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DOUBLE ISSUE 32-33
DECEMBER 2023

Culture and Creativity for Sustainable Development

ISSN 2721-8058
9 772721 805233

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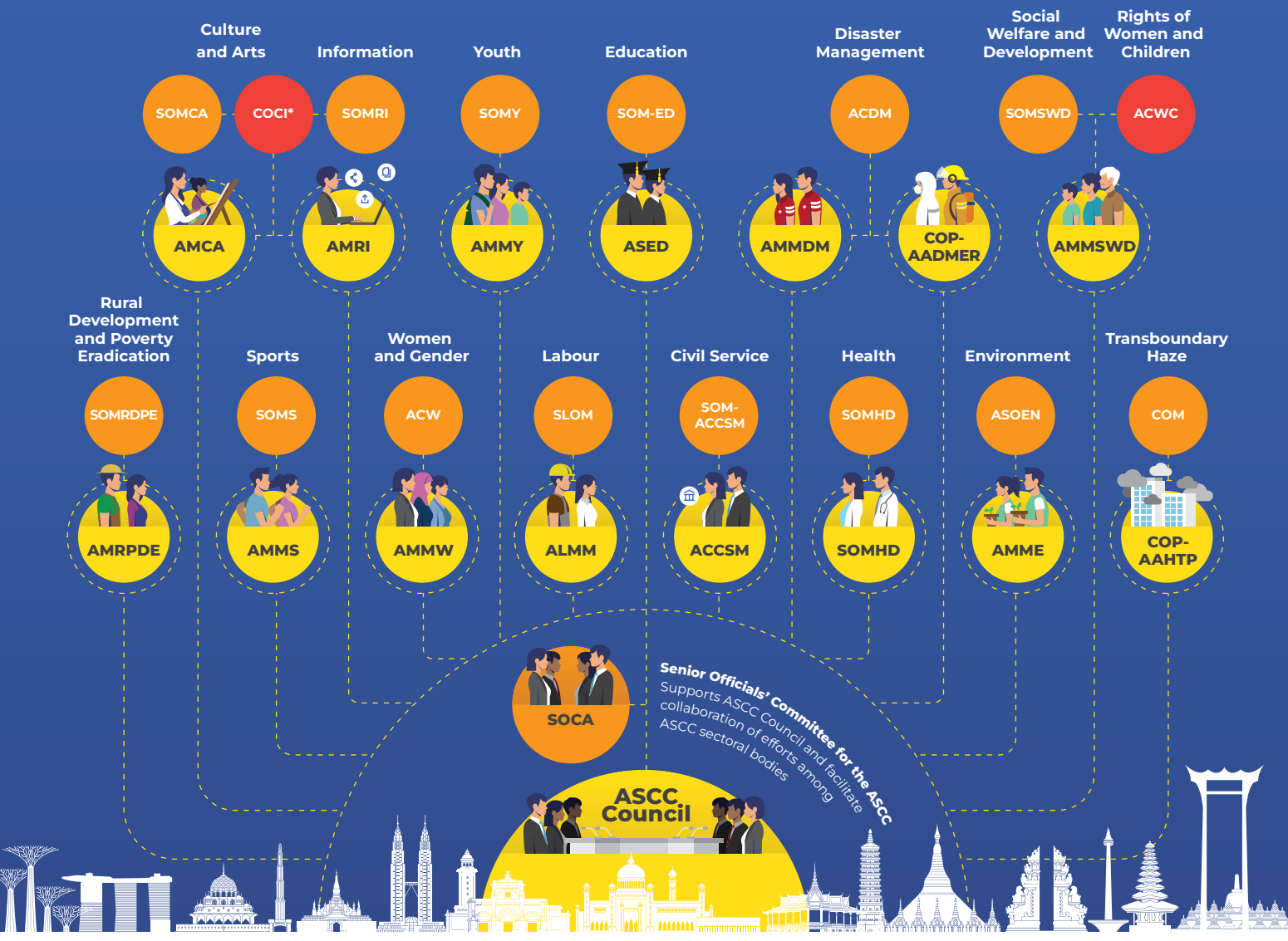
ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

Ministerial Bodies and Senior Officials



AMRI: ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information

AMCA: ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts

AMMY: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth

ASED: ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting

AMMS: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports

AMRDPE: ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

AMMSWD: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

AMMW: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women ALMM-ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting

ACCSM: The Heads of Civil Service Meeting for ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

AHMM: ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting

AMMDM: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management

COP to AADMER: Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response

AMME: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment COP to AATHP-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

SOMCA: Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts

COCI: The ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information

SOMRI: Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information SOMY-Senior Officials Meeting on Youth

SOMED: Senior Officials Meeting on Education

SOMS: Senior Officials Meeting on Sports

SOMRDPE: Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

SOMSWD: Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

ACWC: ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children

ACW: ASEAN Committee on Women

SLOM: Senior Labour Officials Meeting

SOM-ACCSM: Senior Officials Meeting on ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

SOMHD: Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development

ASOEN: ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment

COM to AATHP: Committee under the Conference of Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

**) takes guidance from and reports to both AMCA and AMRI*

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ISSN 2721-8058

Cover by Sarkodit @sarkodit
Layout by Foxidia Digital Media

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Note from the Editorial Team

In 2023, during Indonesia's ASEAN Chairmanship, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) intensified its commitments to crucial issues, emphasising people's health, migrant labour protection, early childhood care and education, gender equality, and climate resilience.

As the ASEAN helm passes to the Lao PDR in 2024, Minister of Culture, Information, Tourism, and Incoming ASCC Council Chair Suanesavanh Vignaket outlines the ASCC priorities. While continuing efforts in health, women's and children's protection, and climate action, the Lao PDR places a significant focus on promoting culture and its role in sustainable development.

In this year-end edition, the significance of preserving, protecting, and promoting cultural heritage is explored, delving into the purpose culture serves in fostering a shared ASEAN identity. Our distinguished contributors offer insights into the importance of our region's rich and diverse cultures in contributing to people's well-being and prosperity.

The Conversations section highlights the region's talented performers, filmmakers, digital artists, and creators, providing a platform to showcase their contributions to the cultural landscape. Recognising the central role of artists and cultural practitioners in shaping the Creative Economy, we highlight the necessity of providing essential support for their endeavours.

With the support of ASEAN and its partners like the Republic of Korea, this is a linchpin in sustaining and enhancing creative industries, fostering innovation, preserving cultural heritage, and contributing to social and economic development.

This issue also features the 50th Commemorative Year of ASEAN-Japan relations, with Ambassador Kiya Masahiko reflecting on significant milestones and discussing prospects for the future.

As the year comes to an end, the ASCC Analysis Division would like to express deep gratitude to the government of India for its support of *The ASEAN* magazine.

We wish you all a safe and prosperous 2024.

Related Issue:

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https://bit.ly/TheASEAN_Creative_Economy

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COVER

About the Artist

Sarkodit is an illustrator from Bandung, Indonesia. He has been drawing since childhood, and now, he finds immense joy in sharing his art and imagination through various illustration projects. In his spare time, Sarkodit tends to his little pots of plants and takes care of his beloved cat.

He also enjoys swimming in the pool and drinking cups of warm chai tea. You can find him through Instagram at @sarkodit.

Suanesavanh Vignaket

Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, the Lao PDR

2024 Chair of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Council

As the Lao PDR assumes the Chairpersonship of ASEAN and your Ministry leads the ASCC, could you share Lao PDR's top priorities for the ASCC?

The Lao PDR's priorities for the ASCC are as follows:

- *Culture and Arts: Promoting the Role of ASEAN Culture and the Arts for Inclusion and Sustainability*
  To promote the role of culture and arts in the ASEAN region in order to strengthen human capacity building and increase more activities and projects of the culture and the arts in developing small and medium-sized cultural enterprises along with *green growth* and *sustainable development*.
- *Promoting Environmental Cooperation: Climate Change Resilience*
  To work on priority areas, including conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management of natural resources; promoting environmentally sustainable cities; addressing climate change by mitigation and adaptation; and sustainable consumption and production. ASEAN needs to upgrade policies and actions, including the formulation of regional policies and engaging in international collaboration to support environmental preservation and sustainable development. It is time for the ASEAN Community to deepen their cooperation on economic recovery, taking into account the urgent needs for green and clean development initiatives, promoting local population livelihoods and food security, and taking effective climate action.
- *Women and Children: Promoting the role of Women and Children towards the transformation of behaviourism in ASEAN*
  To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through the acknowledgement of unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW), a significant issue in many Asian countries, including ASEAN Member States. Women and girls typically spend a disproportionate amount of time on UCDW compared to men and boys, which can limit their opportunities for education, work, and participation in public life.

Photo Credit: ©*Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, the Lao PDR*

- *Health: Transforming ASEAN Health Development Resilience in a New Context*
  The COVID-19 pandemic has shown vulnerabilities in the health system, which has profound implications for health and socio-economic development. There is a need to strengthen the capacity of the health system to be more resilient and ensure timely response and rapid and effective contributions to socio-economic recovery.

The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 outlines goals for the ASEAN region. Could you share how Lao PDR's chairpersonship will contribute to the realisation of this vision, particularly within the ASCC sectors?

ASEAN, like other regions around the world, continues to face myriad challenges, including lingering economic and financial difficulties, even though the region has been gradually recovering from multidimensional disturbances. This ongoing recovery remains fragile. Additionally, issues such as climate change, natural disasters, and traditional and non-traditional security issues continue to be pressing challenges. Against this backdrop, enhancing connectivity and resilience is of utmost importance to ensure ASEAN's collective efforts in strengthening the ASEAN Community, seizing opportunities, and effectively addressing present and emerging challenges.

It is imperative for ASEAN to enhance its cooperation on ASEAN connectivity and resilience by intensifying ASEAN cooperation under the three community pillars: promoting infrastructure connectivity, narrowing the development gap, promoting greater economic integration and people-to-people exchanges, and further strengthening ASEAN's relations with external partners, while maintaining ASEAN's relevance and ASEAN centrality in the evolving regional architecture, among others. Therefore, the Lao PDR has determined the theme for its ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024 "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience" which would significantly contribute to implementing and realising the ASEAN Community Vision 2025.

For the ASCC, a number of important ASEAN documents are expected to submit for adoption, notation and signing by the ASEAN Leaders at the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits in October 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR, namely, the Vang Vieng Declaration on Promoting the Small and Medium-sized Cultural Enterprises aligned with the Green Growth for Sustainable Development; ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change to UNFCCC COP 29; Declaration on Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience Toward ASEAN Community Post-2025; ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Biosafety and Biosecurity; the development of a plan of action to operationalise the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Ending Inequalities and Getting on Track to End AIDS; and development of a plan of action to operationalise the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Ending Inequalities and Getting on Track to End AIDS by 2030.

Furthermore, there are some matters that need to be urgently finalised and implemented within 2024, such as the Establishment Agreement for the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED), the End-Term Review of the ASCC Blueprints, the development of the ASCC Strategic Plan, and so on.

Next year marks a significant chairmanship year for the Lao PDR, which will assume the role of co-chair of the HLTF–ACV, in which the three pillars will deliberate and develop their strategic plans in alignment and realise the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, principally endorsed at the 43rd ASEAN Summit. The Lao PDR ASCC chairmanship expresses its support for getting involved in the loop of cooperation. It also gradually agreed upon the necessity of establishing a mechanism called an Ad-Hoc Working Group to start working on the development of the ASCC strategic plan, which is planned to be endorsed by the Leaders at the ASEAN Summit in 2025.

What are the challenges and opportunities facing the ASCC?

The ASEAN mechanism faces several challenges caused by geopolitical competition between the major powers. This matter will be the main challenge to the Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship role. Therefore, in 2024, we will host various formal and informal meetings with all stakeholders to ensure the process and preparation of the Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship will be successful and comprehensive.

The Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship will elevate its role in the regional and global arenas as a key influencer in cooperation mechanisms and determine the directions of the agreement on various important regional issues concerning protection, peace, stability, security and prosperity.

At the same time, assuming the chairmanship of ASEAN is crucial for Lao PDR as it will emphasise areas of cooperation that align with the key priorities of the chairmanship, particularly the implementation of our national agenda and thereby bringing benefits for Lao PDR. In addition, other key challenges to the implementation of the ASCC's activities and programmes are related to (i) ownership; (ii) national coordination; and (iii) mobilisation of the fund to support various sectoral bodies under the ASCC that remain key challenges for the implementation and development of the current ASCC's Strategic Plan.

Furthermore, it presents a significant opportunity to promote Lao tourism as 2024 has been designated as the Visit Laos Year. This can be achieved though the delegation's media outreach and collaboration with private sector entertainment media, raising awareness and understanding of Lao customs as well as the diverse cultural and tourist attractions spanning from north to south.

In addition, we will take this opportunity to promote our policies, whether it is foreign policy of our party-state or the promotion of socio-economic cooperation between Laos and other countries in the world. As Laos assumes the ASEAN chairmanship, Laos is considered

to be at the focal point of internal attention, providing a crucial opportunity to boost tourism, attract foreign investment, and enhance trade cooperation between Laos and other countries in the world.

This presents a significant opportunity, but it necessitates the vital contribution of all members of society, whether they belong to the public sector, private sector, or the general public. Collaboration is required at all levels, from central to local level, to collectively contribute and ensure that our ASEAN chairmanship attains its objectives and expected deliverables.

The chairmanship of ASEAN serves as an extension of our foreign policy, encompassing principles of peace, independence, friendship, and cooperation through the regional platform and international engagement. The aim is to foster a conducive political environment for national development and create opportunities to promote trade and investment in the Lao People's Democratic Republic according to the direction of economic diplomacy.

The Lao PDR includes promoting culture as one of its priorities during its ASEAN chairmanship. Could you share some of the Lao PDR's initiatives and strategies aimed at preserving and promoting ASEAN's cultural heritage?

The Lao PDR assumes the role of the chair at the 10th Meeting of the ASEAN Minister Responsible for Culture and Arts and its Related Meetings with Dialogue Partners with the theme of "Promoting the Role of ASEAN Culture and the Arts in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemic for Sustainable Development" from 2022 to 2024. The theme aims to promote the role of culture and the arts in the ASEAN region and the ASEAN Plus Three countries in order to strengthen and build capacities and increase more activities and projects in the culture and the arts. The plan is to encourage countries to have more activities that aim to develop small and medium-sized cultural enterprises, and initiatives that address green growth and sustainable development within ASEAN and beyond.

Deputy Secretary-General for ASCC Ekkaphab Phanthavong paid a courtesy call on Lao PDR's Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism and 2024 Chair of ASCC Council Suanesavanh Vignaket to discuss the priorities, deliverables, and technical arrangements for Lao PDR's upcoming ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024 (26/7/2023)

Photo Credit: ©ASEAN Secretariat

The several deliverables, initiatives, and activities are expected to support this priority of culture such as a Declaration on Promoting the Small and Medium-sized Cultural Enterprises aligned with the Green Growth for Sustainable Development; the ASEAN Vientiane Performing Arts Programme; the ASEAN Vientiane Film Week; The Best of ASEAN Performing Arts 2024: "ASEAN as One Stage"; ASEAN-Japan Youth Exchange Programme on the Creative Fine Arts Productions; ASEAN-Korea Music Festival 2024; the ASEAN's Musical Instrumentalist Students Exchange Programme; the Saa Paper Workshop to Promote Plastic-Free in ASEAN; and the ASEAN Heritage Train-Enhancing Connectivity towards Cultural Diversity.

How can culture contribute to the region's development and help shape a shared ASEAN identity, and what role can Lao PDR play in advancing these goals?

The ASEAN Culture and Arts Sector holds a very important role in contributing to national socio-economic development. It also plays a crucial part within the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Pillar, through its substantial efforts to implement and realise the ASEAN Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts 2016-2025, ASCC Blueprint 2025, and ASEAN's Vision 2025.

ASEAN has a unique identity, with diverse cultures and arts, traditions, languages, and religions. Even though there are differences, the people of ASEAN live together peacefully, in harmonious solidarity, mutual assistance, and people-to-people connectivity through the effective and efficient ASEAN cooperation mechanisms. It is especially true in working together to preserve and promote cultural heritage and share best practices for the sustainable development and prosperity of each ASEAN nation.

The Lao PDR has played an important role in this scope of work, particularly in identifying culture and arts as a foundation for national sustainability. Culture is also a driver for social advancement in strengthening human resource development, fostering harmonious sodality in society, promoting justice, and achieving people's mental and material well-being.

The Lao government, together with its people, has revitalised the country's culture through different platforms. One such initiative is building cultural families and villages, which includes organising cultural festivals and traditional events for our people to participate in. These cultural exchanges promote the different ethnic groups among the Lao people, encouraging them to respect and understand each other, establish friendly ties, and cooperate in efforts toward social harmony, prosperity, and sustainable development.

ASCC OUTCOMES UNDER INDONESIA'S 2023 ASEAN CHAIRMANSHIP

Indonesia's 2023 ASEAN Chairmanship, under the theme "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth," has produced notable impacts, particularly on the socio-economic domain. It has affirmed ASEAN centrality and significantly supported Member States in their post-pandemic rebuilding efforts. Within the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Pillar, the adoption and notation of the ensuing outcome documents reflect the region's commitment to ensuring that its people reap the benefits of progress and experience improved well-being.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo handed over the next ASEAN Chairmanship to Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone after the 43rd ASEAN Summit at the Jakarta Convention Center on 7 September 2023

Adopted by the 42nd ASEAN Summit, 9–11 May 2023, Labuan Bajo, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia

1. ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on One Health Initiative
2. ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations
3. ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers
4. ASEAN Leaders' Joint Statement on the Establishment of an ASEAN Villages Network

Adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 43rd ASEAN Summit, 4–7 September 2023, Jakarta, Indonesia

1. ASEAN Declaration on Disability-Inclusive Development and Partnership for a Resilient ASEAN Community
2. ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change to the 28th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP28)
3. ASEAN Declaration on Gender Equality and Family Development
4. ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Early Childhood Care and Education in Southeast Asia
5. ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Sustainable Resilience

Noted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 43rd ASEAN Summit, 4–7 September 2023, Jakarta, Indonesia

1. Terms of Reference of ASEAN One Health Network
2. ASEAN One Health Joint Plan of Action
3. ASEAN Villages Network Framework
4. Regional Guidance for the ASEAN Member States on Strengthening the Role of Social Workers and the Wider Social Service Workforce in the Health Sector
5. Regional Guidance for ASEAN Member States on Strengthening the Role of Social Workers and the Wider Social Service Workforce in the Justice Sector
6. ASEAN Regional Guidance on Empowering Women and Children: Delivering Quality Social Work Services for Those at Risk of or Affected by Violence
7. Policy Recommendations on Integrating Gender Mainstreaming in ASEAN
8. ASEAN Guidelines on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations
9. Guidance Document of ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Competitiveness, Resilience, and Agility of Workers for the Future of Work
10. ASEAN Action Plan for Invasive Alien Species (IAS) Management
11. Second Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation (Haze-Free Roadmap) 2023-2030
12. Second ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS) 2023-2030
13. Investment Framework for Haze-Free Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia
14. 6th ASEAN State of Environment Report (SOER6)
15. Revised Financial Rules of ASEAN Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMER) Fund
16. 2nd Report of ASEAN Youth Development Index
17. 1st ASEAN Physical Fitness Indicators (APFI) Report
18. Roadmap of the Declaration on Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN
19. Joint Statement of the 2nd ASEAN Ministerial Dialogue on Accelerating Actions to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals
20. Establishment Agreement of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control (ACC THPC)
21. Establishment Agreement of the ASEAN Centre for Climate Change
22. Draft ASEAN Community's Vision 2045

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Culture Matters in a Changing World

Jonathan Tan Ghee Tiong
Head, Culture and Information Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Our world is changing rapidly, and that is changing the many ways in which we live, work, and play. Today's problems and crises, ranging from climate change and disasters to conflicts and pandemics, are "wicked" or too complex to solve. Finding sustainable solutions requires us to transcend a silo, sector-centric discourse, and yet global policy dialogues on these pertinent problems are anything but.

Why does culture matter in our changing world? If it does, where does culture matter, and what could be the role of culture in contributing to a sustainable future? Can culture, for example, be a solution for climate change?

For the second time in forty years, the largest international conference on culture—UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development (MONDIACULT)—held in 2022 gave life to the transversal role that culture could play in sustainable development and upheld the role of culture as a global public good (UNESCO, 2022).

The MONDIACULT conference was a watershed for culture since the first MONDIACULT in 1982 redefined the role of culture beyond the arts and letters to embrace "modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, and beliefs" (UNESCO, n.d.).

It is encouraging that policy dialogues worldwide are beginning to recognise the notion of culture as an important driver for sustainable development, notably with the inclusion of culture within the G20 ambit. Indonesia's presidency of G20 in 2022 spoke to the theme of "Culture for Sustainable Living" during the G20 Culture meeting, where it stressed the role of culture as an enabler and driver of sustainable living.

The MONDIACULT Declaration acknowledged the "growing shift towards enhanced transversality of culture in public policies, enabling, inclusive, and participatory cultural policies, involving a multiplicity of actors..."

Before the pandemic, a survey carried out by the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property in 2019 showed that 90 per cent of respondents felt that culture has a large impact on their lives (ICCROM, n.d.).

The social value of culture became pronounced during the pandemic, serving as a valuable coping mechanism for society and anchoring communities with a greater sense of belonging and solidarity at a time when social interactions became restricted.

However, culture remains very much on the sidelines of many global discourses tackling pressing issues we face today. As culture does not have a dedicated goal in the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), culture is sometimes seen as being everywhere but nowhere. It is therefore worth noting that the MONDIACULT Conference recognised that culture should have its own goal in the post-2030 SDGs agenda.

The urgency of the climate crisis and emerging challenges due to

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resource scarcity, from food to water security, demands solutions beyond science and technology. In Southeast Asia—a region culturally rich with traditional and indigenous knowledge systems—injecting a cultural standpoint may help support environmental and socio-cultural resilience.

For example, as opposed to fast fashion with unsustainable practices, traditional clothing such as the *batik* reflects the inextricable linkage between production methods and ecological awareness that has been passed down from generation to generation. Likewise, the development of sustainable agriculture and biodiversity may take a leaf from long-standing traditional knowledge systems that could offer climate adaptation solutions. Similarly, disaster management may stand to benefit from combining modern science and technology with tried and tested traditional wisdom and cultural practices.

Cognisant of culture's contribution to sustainable development, ASEAN is implementing many initiatives that amplify culture's role in climate action. Malaysia recently led a regional initiative, "The ASEAN Workshop on Sustainable Heritage Food Packaging and Commercialisation for the World Market," to underline the importance of the traditional way of packaging food using natural resources such as banana leaves, bamboo, and palm leaves to mitigate the use of plastic and Styrofoam.

Also, the "ASEAN Young Creative Artwork" initiative led by the Lao PDR featured artworks made from recycled resources such as aluminium, paper, iron wire, plastic drinking cups, wood, glass bottles, and fishing nets in an exhibition. Another initiative by Thailand, "Rain Motions: Connecting (with) the Skies of Southeast Asia," comprised a contemporary dance performance and a multi-disciplinary seminar to share knowledge on promoting and preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage associated with rain.

A culture-based approach that draws on the comparative strengths of long-standing indigenous practices and knowledge systems while leveraging the digital pivot will be relevant to ASEAN. This is especially true for ASEAN, given that it is a disaster-prone region with an increasing frequency of transboundary disasters. The multidimensional impacts across Member States demand a diversity of solutions in which culture could play a nexus role.

Furthermore, culture could play a relevant role in driving climate action and support through the development of cultural narratives that draw on the creative expressions of art and heritage. It is useful to involve cultural actors and resources in conversations on climate change because environmental awareness-raising through creative and curative forms may resonate more widely and galvanise more people to action.

At the same time, such conversations on the interrelationship between culture and environment could push the culture sector to play its part in mitigating climate change. A think-tank report titled *Creative Industries and the Climate Emergency: The Path to Net Zero* noted that "some 80 per cent of the environmental impacts of a product are locked in at the design phase" (Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC), UK, 2022). Given that many sectors in the creative economy are design-led disciplines, including fashion, architecture, and crafts or industries that make use of substantial materials and resources, such as film and theatre set design, it is worthwhile to foster more conversations on the relationship between culture and environment to find effective ways for the creative and culture sector to work toward waste reduction and net zero. Furthermore, the contribution of the creative and culture sector toward sustainability is in and of itself a form of cultural value.

Also at the heart of a culture-based approach to sustainability is the need to build sustainable ecosystems for the culture sector, incorporating cross-cutting policies and improving working conditions for cultural professionals. Such an approach is especially important at a time when digitalisation is disrupting labour and some jobs are at risk of becoming obsolete. The International Federation of Arts Council and Agencies (IFACCA) report, *A Crisis of Sustainable Careers: Examining Working Conditions for Independent and Cultural Workers*, underlined the need to reaffirm cultural workers as rightful members of a society's labour force and to dispel "a perception that the process of creating art is not work automatically entitled to the legitimate rewards enjoyed by other types of labour (IFACCA, 2022)."

Digital transformation and climate change are cross-cutting trends that are bringing profound impact to bear on every sector, including culture. These developments represent challenges that the culture sector would have to manage. At the same time, they offer unprecedented opportunities that could be harnessed for the greater good. As we learn to navigate the challenges of digital transformation and climate change better and, more importantly, capitalise on the momentum to change the way we live, work, and play, it is useful to draw on culture's strengths that may offer an array of solutions in forging a brave new world of sustainability and vitality. To this end, we must start to foster an expansive and inclusive discourse in global and regional policy dialogue that is more cognisant of the creative and curative merits of culture and the role it could play in solving the wicked problems that the world is facing today.

Note: The author would like to thank and acknowledge the exchange of views with Magdalena Moreno Mujica (Executive Director, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies) in the development of this article.

References may be accessed through this link: https://bit.ly/Issue32_Ref

SAME SAME Yet Different

Christina Yeo Ken Yin, PhD
Undersecretary of International Relations (Culture), Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC)

ASEAN has always been described as the melting pot of different cultures, traditions and beliefs. Almost all the countries in this region consist of dozens of ethnicities and tribes, each with distinct spoken languages and dialects, food, costumes, dances and festivities. Yet, we are said to have a shared identity.

One of the dancers performing, accompanied by Orkestra Tradisional Malaysia, Istana Budaya

Photo Credit: © *Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC)*

This juxtaposition demonstrates the uniqueness of ASEAN. We are the same but also different. Let's take the *kebaya* as an example. It is an upper garment that symbolises the cultural heritage and identity of the Malays, Peranakan Chinese, Chitty, and other communities in Malaysia and other ASEAN countries.

The *kebaya* is an intangible cultural heritage which involves traditional weaving skills such as embroidery and sewing techniques with different fabrics, patterns, and designs across the region. The *kebaya*-wearing concept is similar, albeit with variations like *Baju Kebaya Labuh* and *Pendek*, *Baju Kebaya Nyonya*, *Baju Bandung*, *Baju Kota Bharu*, *Baju Kebaya Sulam,* and *Kebaya Biku*.

This year, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand submitted a *multi-national* bid to nominate the *kebaya* for the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. It is heartening to witness the community of practitioners and policy-makers from five countries jointly work towards a shared goal to promote and preserve the *kebaya*.

Malaysia is blessed with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, and we recognise the importance of cultural heritage protection as a key development agenda. Malaysia commits to implementing various cultural, artistic, and heritage conservation initiatives in the local and international spheres, including the ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information (ASEAN COCI).

ASEAN COCI promotes cultural cooperation

Into its 45th year of inception, ASEAN COCI has done wonders in promoting cultural cooperation among the people of ASEAN. Various activities and projects, ranging from workshops, masterclasses, camps, seminars, and exchanges, are conducted annually by ASEAN Member States and jointly with external partners. These programmes facilitate interactions amongst ASEAN cultural policy-makers, artists, cultural

Opening ceremony of Echoes of ASEAN Bronze and Rhythm of Kinabalu, jointly officiated by the Sabah Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister, and the Secretary General, Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Malaysia (MOTAC) who represented the Minister of MOTAC on 28 October 2023 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

communities, the youth, academia, practitioners, professionals, civil society organisations, as well as small and medium cultural enterprises or SMCEs, in the areas of protection, conservation, preservation, and promotion of cultural heritage.

Cultural projects implemented by Malaysia in 2023

This year, Malaysia, via the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), had the opportunity to co-create and co-execute two projects with its strategic partners under the ASEAN Cultural Fund.

The first project, anchored on the narrative "Our Food, Our Heritage, Our Identity," was launched in June 2023. The ASEAN Workshop on Sustainable Heritage Food Packaging and Commercialisation for the World Market is a strategic approach to consolidating expert recommendations to improve the current packaging methods and commercialising heritage foods amongst ASEAN countries in local and global markets. It paves the way for collaborative and interdisciplinary research towards the sustainability of heritage food in ASEAN.

Why the focus on food? And what has food got to do with heritage and identity? Heritage food is an outcome of intangible cultural heritage. It has been redefined as typical local cuisines embedded with cultural values, representing the community's lifestyle. It symbolises their life, culture, and heritage values.

The two-day workshop was implemented by the Department of National Heritage, an agency under MOTAC, in collaboration with Universiti Putra Malaysia. Participants from ASEAN countries, comprising notable presenters and demonstrators of packaged heritage food, showcased their culinary skills in preparing appetisers, snacks, and desserts using traditional wrapping materials in full adherence to health, safety, and hygiene procedures.

The research findings, ideas, theories, and experiences on the best practices for promoting and commercialising sustainably packaged heritage food were also shared and exchanged. The valuable insights and workshop proceedings have since been documented

Performers at the regional gathering themed "Echoes of ASEAN Bronze"

Forum and roundtable discussion on sustainable heritage food packaging

Photo Credit: © *Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC)*

and published to benefit other researchers and practitioners in this field.

Held in October, the second project revolved around bronze musical instruments classified as "idiophones" a term which refers to a group of musical instruments made from hard metals like iron, copper, and bronze that produce sound through vibrations. Themed "Harmony in Rhythm and Melody," the instruments were chosen as a symbol of unity.

With the main objective of sharing best practices and exchanging experiences amongst ASEAN countries, "Echoes of ASEAN Bronze" was organised through workshops, arts and music performances. It aimed to strengthen cultural cooperation through composition, documentation, and music performance.

Traditional forms of artistic expression and cultural practices contribute significantly to the growth and development of a society. It is hoped that this project will be a turning point in revitalising traditional music in Sabah, drawing the interest of younger generations. In fact, efforts to preserve traditional musical instruments can foster a sense of unity and togetherness.

Led by Istana Budaya (National Theatre of Malaysia–IB), this project was strategically curated to complement the Rhythm of Kinabalu (ROK) Festival, a vibrant street carnival held annually in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. The ROK Festival, organised by the National Department of Culture and Arts (JKKN), highlights art activities as part of the Sabah State Government's effort to boost and drive the local cultural and creative industry. It also increases appreciation for music and dance, particularly amongst the local community in Sabah.

This programme's social and economic impacts on the local community cannot be overstated. Sales and revenues of the local craftspreneurs, artists, and food stalls operators increased during the programme. The ASEAN participants' showcase entertained over 30,000 visitors, including foreign tourists, each highlighting their countries' unique music and culture. More than 5,000 online viewers watched the event's Facebook live streaming.

Conclusion

The notion of culture as a "social glue" is fundamental. According to the findings of the *Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda* report, there is an underappreciation of culture and cultural activity in the articulation of SDGs.

To my earlier points on ASEAN being so diverse, we do share some commonalities, albeit with distinctions. We must stay aligned with the 2000 ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage that underlines our commitment to identify, delineate, protect, conserve, promote, develop, and transmit our significant cultural heritage to future generations.

Let us continue celebrating our diversity and advancing ASEAN priorities towards a greater and stronger community.

References may be accessed through this link: https://bit.ly/Issue32_Ref

The ASEAN Walk aims to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of artistic diversity across ASEAN Member States, highlighting regional unity and creativity

ASEAN Walk

Where Nature Meets Art

Mohd Abdoh Damit

Acting Director For Culture And The Arts, Ministry Of Culture, Youth And Sports, Brunei Darussalam

Mohd. Abdoh Damit is the Chair for Brunei Darussalam's Sub-Committee on Culture (SCC) of the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information. He proposed the project "Completing ASEAN Sculptures at Taman Damuan" in 2015 during the 15th Meeting of the SCC in Singapore and subsequently chaired the working committee of the project.

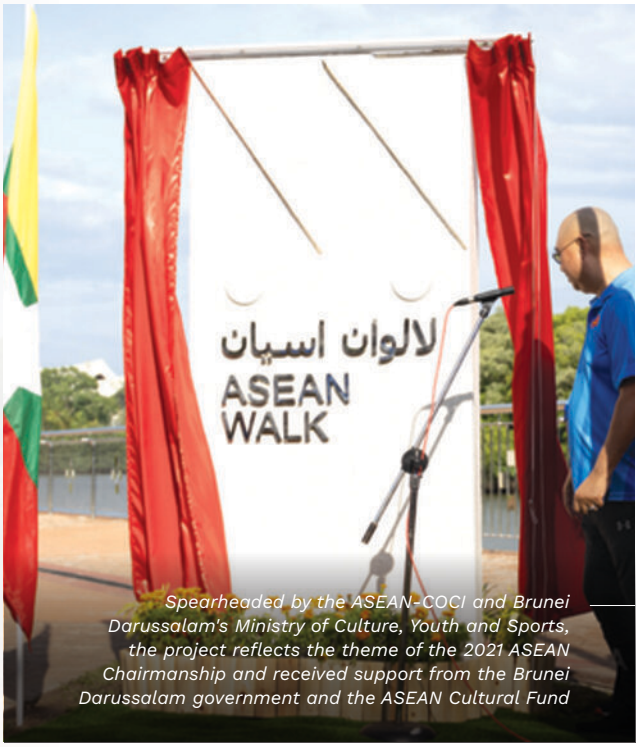
The ASEAN Walk is a testament to the vibrant confluence of arts, culture, and regional identity within the ASEAN community. Established with the primary aim of fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the diverse artistic expressions across ASEAN Member States, the outdoor exhibit serves as both a celebration of creativity and a tangible embodiment of the region's unity. The main objectives of the ASEAN Walk revolve around promoting cultural exchange, enhancing awareness of ASEAN's shared identity, and providing a platform for artists to showcase their talents on an international stage.

The ASEAN Walk project stands as a meaningful extension of the esteemed 1986 initiative, the ASEAN Sculpture Garden, which laid the foundation for celebrating the artistic diversity within the ASEAN community. Sculptures from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand were first inaugurated at the Damuan Recreational Park. Sculptures from Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam completed the collection. Brunei Darussalam is the first ASEAN Member State to display sculptures from all ten members of ASEAN.

Spearheaded by the Sub-Committee on Culture of the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (ASEAN-

The exhibit, located along the Damuan River, attracts a wide range of visitors

Artists from each ASEAN Member State contributed sculptures that aligned with themes of unity, diversity, and mutual understanding



Spearheaded by the ASEAN-COCI and Brunei Darussalam's Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, the project reflects the theme of the 2021 ASEAN Chairmanship and received support from the Brunei Darussalam government and the ASEAN Cultural Fund

COCI) and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, the project received substantial support from the ASEAN Cultural Fund and the Government of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam. Notably, this endeavour was intricately woven into the fabric of Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2021, where it emerged as a pivotal deliverable. By seamlessly continuing the legacy of the ASEAN Sculpture Garden, the ASEAN Walk connects the past with the present, and reinforces the commitment to fostering cultural unity and identity within the ASEAN region.

The significance of the ASEAN Walk project resonates profoundly with the overarching theme of ASEAN in 2021, "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper." In alignment with this theme, the project not only symbolises the care and commitment of ASEAN Member States towards their shared cultural heritage, but also reflects the meticulous preparation undertaken to showcase the vibrant diversity and unity of the region. Through the completion of the ASEAN Walk, the project contributes to the collective prosperity of the ASEAN community by fostering mutual understanding, celebrating artistic expression, and cultivating a sense of shared identity.

Each ASEAN Member State was invited to nominate its artist and sculptures. Emphasising inclusivity, the organisers collaborated with the respective cultural ministries to identify and invite artists. The selection criteria often prioritised artists who could encapsulate the essence of their nation's cultural heritage while contributing to the overarching theme of unity. This thematic coherence is crucial to creating a cohesive narrative that reflects the rich tapestry of ASEAN's collective identity. Artists from ASEAN Member States were also paired with local artists from Brunei Darussalam, whilst the completion of the sculptures was helped by institutes of higher education.

A distinctive theme runs through the artwork featured in the ASEAN Walk, weaving a narrative thread that connects each sculpture into a harmonious ensemble. While the specific theme may vary with each iteration of the outdoor exhibit, it invariably revolves around the core principles of unity, diversity, and mutual understanding. Artists are encouraged to infuse their creations with elements that speak to the unique cultural nuances of their respective countries, fostering an atmosphere where the shared values of ASEAN are celebrated through artistic expression.

Amid the grandeur of the ASEAN Walk project, it faced numerous challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Completing this ambitious venture required innovative solutions and adaptability. The initial stages, including meetings and collaborative design sessions with artists from ASEAN Member States, were conducted online, highlighting the project's resilience in the face of adversity. The pandemic necessitated a re-evaluation of timelines, and the project experienced a temporary stall due to the global health crisis. Despite these challenges, the commitment of all involved parties, including the ASEAN-COCI, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, and the artists themselves, remained unwavering. This period of uncertainty underscored the importance of cultural endeavours in fostering resilience and unity, with the

Photo Credit: ©*ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information*

> The significance of the ASEAN Walk project resonates profoundly with the overarching theme of ASEAN in 2021, "We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper."

Building on the legacy of the 1986 ASEAN Sculpture Garden initiative, the ASEAN Walk features sculptures from all ten ASEAN Member States

eventual completion of the ASEAN Walk standing as a testament to the collective determination to overcome obstacles and promote the rich cultural tapestry of the ASEAN region.

The ASEAN Walk is a powerful catalyst for promoting arts, culture, and ASEAN awareness. Through the diverse array of sculptures, visitors are invited to embark on a visual journey that transcends geographical boundaries, offering glimpses into the cultural heritage of each ASEAN Member State. The exhibit becomes a dynamic space where traditional and contemporary artistic forms converge, providing a platform for dialogue between the past and the present. Beyond aesthetics, the sculptures become cultural ambassadors, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity among ASEAN citizens.

At its core, the ASEAN Walk represents ASEAN's strong commitment to nurturing a collective consciousness and fostering mutual respect among Member States. By intertwining arts and culture, the outdoor exhibit becomes a tangible manifestation of the shared history, values, and aspirations that bind the ASEAN community together. Each sculpture's intricate dance of colours, shapes, and symbols in each sculpture serves as a visual representation of the cultural harmony that ASEAN strives to achieve.

Visitors to the ASEAN Walk were captivated by the amazing backdrop of the outdoor exhibit, the Damuan River, transcending the ordinary and offering a unique exploration of the region's artistic and cultural diversity. The visitors' reactions have been diverse, ranging from appreciation for the craftsmanship of individual sculptures to a broader recognition of the unity that underlies the diversity showcased. The exhibit has become a focal point for cultural exchange, drawing individuals from various walks of life into a shared space for recreation, leisure, and sports activities.

The impact of the ASEAN Walk extends beyond the exhibit's duration. As visitors engage with the sculptures, a ripple effect is created, sparking conversations about the rich cultural heritage embedded in each artwork. Educational programmes and guided tours further amplify the impact, providing context and insights into the historical and cultural significance of the sculptures. This multifaceted approach ensures that the ASEAN Walk becomes a catalyst for long-term cultural exchange, contributing to the broader mission of fostering a strong sense of ASEAN identity.

The ASEAN Walk provides an amazing experience, blending of arts, culture, and regional identity within the ASEAN community. Through careful curation, thematic coherence, and a commitment to inclusivity, the outdoor exhibit not only promotes the rich artistic heritage of the Member States but also serves as a powerful tool for enhancing awareness and understanding of the shared identity that binds the diverse nations of ASEAN. As visitors traverse the walk, they become participants in a collective celebration of unity, leaving indelible impressions that resonate long after their stroll through this cultural tapestry.

A heartfelt expression of gratitude extends to all the artists, students, and individuals whose unwavering dedication and creative prowess breathed life into the ASEAN Walk through the completion of these remarkable sculptures. These contributions have transformed the outdoor exhibit into a vibrant tapestry of cultural expression, uniting the diverse narratives of each ASEAN Member State. The collaborative spirit and commitment demonstrated by the artists, paired with the invaluable support of students and everyone involved, have elevated the ASEAN Walk to a symbol of shared identity and unity.

Acknowledgements may be accessed through this link: https://bit.ly/Issue32_Acknowledgements

ASEAN Street Food
A Culinary Journey

Photo Credit: ©ASEAN Cultural Center

Pisa Santhadkarn
ASEAN Cultural Center

Nat Sakethipohn
ASEAN Cultural Center

Participants present up an array regional culinary delights during the 2023 ASEAN Day celebration at the ASEAN Cultural Center

The ASEAN Cultural Center is Southeast Asia's first cultural learning centre on ASEAN in the heart of Bangkok's historic and culturally rich district. Established under the auspices of Thailand's Ministry of Culture, the ASEAN Cultural Center occupies the third floor of the Ratchadamnoen Contemporary Art Center. Since its official opening on 7 August 2015, the ASEAN Cultural Center has served as a regional hub for fostering understanding and appreciation of ASEAN's shared cultural heritage. Its meticulously curated exhibitions, which span 900 square meters, showcase the region's rich history, vibrant traditions, and diverse cultural expressions.

> Since its official opening on 7 August 2015, the ASEAN Cultural Center has served as a regional hub for fostering understanding and appreciation of ASEAN's shared cultural heritage.

One of the most popular exhibitions at the ASEAN Cultural Center is "ASEAN Street Food," which takes visitors on a culinary journey through the region's vibrant street food scene. Through holographic technology, visitors can gain insights into the history, ingredients, and preparation methods of iconic street food dishes from across ASEAN. From *lort cha* in Cambodia to *satay* in Indonesia and *larb* in the Lao PDR, the exhibition brings these culinary treasures to life, immersing visitors in the rich tapestry of flavours and traditions that define ASEAN street food.

In addition to the interactive exhibits, the ASEAN Cultural Center, through its captivating exhibitions and enriching cultural events, plays a pivotal role in safeguarding and promoting this culinary tapestry, ensuring that future generations can continue to cherish the unique flavours and traditions that make ASEAN cuisine truly exceptional.

Visitors consistently express a keen interest in participating in the culinary culture activities organised by the ASEAN Cultural Center.

The ASEAN Day activities, held annually on different themes, are a prime example of this enthusiasm. These events, commemorating the establishment of the ASEAN on 8 August 1967 and the opening of the ASEAN Cultural Center on 7 August 2015, provide a platform for cultural exchange and celebration.

In 2019, the ASEAN Cultural Center organised an event titled "Coconut, the Great Ingredient of ASEAN" to highlight the versatility and significance of coconut, an economically valuable plant and a staple ingredient in both savoury and sweet dishes across ASEAN cuisines. During the event, the ASEAN Member States' embassies in Thailand showcased various coconut-based dishes from their respective countries. The Philippines presented *Bicol express*, a hearty dish featuring sweet and spicy chicken cooked in coconut milk. Viet Nam delighted visitors with its popular desserts, including young coconut sago and red bean plum with coconut milk, while Indonesia presented *dadar gulung*, Indonesian-style coconut pancakes.

In 2020, to commemorate the Year of ASEAN Identity, the ASEAN Cultural Center organised activities to showcase the distinctive culinary traditions of ASEAN. Participants had the opportunity to witness and savour a selection of outstanding dishes prepared by the Embassies of ASEAN countries in Thailand. These dishes included *nasi lemak* from Malaysia, *adobo* from the Philippines, and Singapore chili crab from Singapore. In addition to sampling these culinary delights, honourable representatives from the Embassies of ASEAN Member States and visitors also had the opportunity to participate in a cooking demonstration of *tom yum kung* (spicy coconut shrimp soup). This renowned Thai dish is currently under consideration for UNESCO Intangible Heritage status. Through these activities, the ASEAN Cultural Center effectively highlighted the diverse and vibrant culinary landscape of ASEAN, fostering a deeper appreciation for the region's unique flavours, traditions, and culinary heritage.

Photo Credit: ©*ASEAN Cultural Center*

In 2023, the Center continued its initiatives with a project titled "Empowering MSMEs in ASEAN Gastronomic Business". The participants comprised representatives from MSMEs across 10 ASEAN Member States, including food entrepreneurs, chefs, and successful local business owners. During the conference, the delegates engaged in knowledge exchange sessions, sharing individual experiences in fostering creativity within the region's food industry. They gained insights from discussions on key success factors, development guidelines, and strategies for overcoming challenges and obstacles faced in ASEAN gastronomic businesses. The project culminated in an exhibition titled "Creative City of Gastronomy in ASEAN" where participants engaged in collaborative cooking.

Additionally, several supplementary culinary activities were organised to commemorate various events. For instance, the ASEAN Creative Cities 2021 highlighted the value of creative cities in ASEAN that UNESCO selected to join the Creative Cities Network in 2021. Phetchaburi Province in Thailand and Kuching City in Malaysia were recognised as ASEAN Creative Cities of Gastronomy, while Jakarta, Indonesia, was designated a Creative City of Literature. The event featured exhibitions, keynote speeches about all three cities, and a cooking demonstration by a guest speaker from Phetchaburi, Creative Cities of Gastronomy. These activities showcased ASEAN's rich culinary heritage and cultural diversity, fostering a deeper appreciation for the region's unique gastronomic offerings.

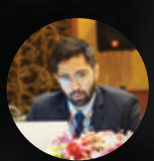
Furthermore, throughout 2022-2023, the ASEAN Cultural Center in Bangkok hosted the "The ASEAN Community in Rattanakosin Period" event as part of the Rattanakosin establishment commemoration. This event aimed to disseminate knowledge about the settlement of traditional ASEAN communities in Bangkok, comprising six ethnic groups: Khmer, Vietnamese, Myanmar, Mon, Muslim, and Lao. The activities included exhibitions, knowledge exchange and keynote presentations, cultural illustrations and demonstrations, and video media tracing Bangkok's traditional ASEAN community tourism routes. Additionally, experts specialising in gastronomy and ASEAN ethnic culture presented their insights. Participants also had the opportunity to visit shops and savour authentic flavours—such as *pak krim pla* from the Yuan community, chicken *massaman* from the Muslim community, *samosa* from the Myanmar community, *khao chae* or rice-soaked infused flower water from the Mon community—and embark on walking tours through these communities to explore their distinct yet unique ways of life. By immersing participants in the actual community spaces, they gained first hand exposure to the preservation and evidence of traditional architecture, exceptional cultural art, lifestyle, and unique culinary techniques, particularly evident in the Samsen area in Bangkok, Thailand, which is home to the Vietnamese community.

The ASEAN Cultural Center and its initiatives to promote ASEAN's diverse cultures effectively promote a better understanding of ASEAN's diverse, yet unified culture. These efforts are made evident to the centre's global visitors, fostering a network of regional collaborators for robust future activity implementation and cooperation. This will play a crucial role in leveraging culture as a tool to propel the ASEAN economy forward, both regionally and globally. Ultimately, the ASEAN Cultural Center will remain committed to serving as a hub for knowledge and information dissemination, fostering collaboration, exchange, learning, and building collaborative ASEAN cooperation in all spheres.

Note: The Ministry of Culture of Thailand established the ASEAN Cultural Center in 2015. The Center welcomes everyone to engage, comment, provide suggestions, and follow ASEAN cultural narratives through its Facebook Fan Page and Instagram account @aseanculturalcenter

SAFEGUARDING OUR TRADITIONS THROUGH INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

Christian Dior's Spring-Summer 2021 Collection features Endek fabric from Bali at the Paris Fashion Week, 29 September 2020



Bakhtiar Bandial
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The intellectual property (IP) system has long been perceived as an enabler of commerce. However, to indigenous groups worldwide, and indeed within ASEAN, the IP system has increasingly been seen as a tool for safeguarding cultural heritage while promoting the commercialisation of traditional cultural knowledge and practices. With cultural piracy and the misappropriation of traditional works on the rise due to an increasingly borderless commerce ecosystem, could IP be the appropriate link between cultural preservation, cultural appreciation, and economic development? How could IP provide a connection between the products and expressions of indigenous groups and their provincial, national and regional governments for the prosperity of all?

Defining traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions

Traditional knowledge (TK) refers to the know-how, skills and practices developed and sustained through generations within a community. Meanwhile, traditional cultural expressions (TCEs) are the artistic or traditional representations of a community's cultural and social identities. The two overlaps, falling under the umbrella of "intangible cultural heritage." Using the example of the famous Lamphun Silk of Thailand, the method of weaving and the knowledge applied in cultivating cotton trees and methods of dying could all be classified as TK, while the final silk product would be the TCE.

The term "traditional" denotes the transmission of both knowledge and expressions from one generation to the next within a specific cultural group.

IP protection systems

Protection mechanisms for TK and TCE vary throughout the world. Artistic forms of knowledge and cultural expressions are often protected through a country's copyright and trademark systems, but there are limitations.

Copyright protection is usually granted to the author of a work (literary, dramatical, musical, and artistic) for a limited period, often for the length of an author's life plus an additional 70 years. However, this protection may be insufficient to protect traditional cultural expressions. ASEAN Member States have recognised this shortcoming of traditional copyright laws.

In Indonesia, the copyright system is applied to protect works related to TCEs, with the Copyright Act ensuring that TCE rights endure indefinitely while protecting "communal" groups. In contrast, traditional copyright is often only granted to a limited group of authors.

In Viet Nam, a 2011 government decree recognised TCEs (referred to as "Folklore" in the declaration) as eligible for extended copyright protection, including all artistic expressions of culture such as village festivals, folk games, dances and traditional tales, among others. Such government decree has allowed the Vietnamese cultural art of Cải Lương, a Vietnamese form of folk opera, to flourish as stronger recognition has resulted in modern theatre groups collaborating with traditional Cải Lương performers to create contemporary performances that are culturally accurate.

Other than copyright protection, the trademark system, including collective and certification marks of authentic goods from traditional communities, could be beneficial to promoting TK and TCE. Trademark laws can fortify the markets of products derived from TK and TCE by preventing the erroneous granting of trademark protection to those outside the traditional communities.

One example in Malaysia is the Sarawak Litsea, a small tree whose oil composition has antimicrobial properties, and its product derivatives (including a medicinal oil and tea) that are protected by a series of trademarks applied for by the government of the State of Sarawak. The protection includes attributions and benefit sharing credited for the Bidayuh, Iban, Kelabit, and Lun Bawang communities of the Sarawak region. The Litsea tree has long been known for its medicinal properties by these four indigenous communities of Sarawak. In this case, intellectual property protection coupled with appropriate government intervention and benefit sharing has produced a best practice case in managing and preserving TK and TCE in ASEAN.

Beyond IP—the importance of intervention and organisational support

While this article has discussed how various mechanisms of the IP system can be used to protect TK and TCE, it is clear that both the trademark and copyright systems were not explicitly designed with TK and TCE in mind. Therefore, precise legislation on TK and TCE that considers the core issues is vital and is currently undergoing. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a specialised UN agency responsible for promoting and protecting intellectual property globally, currently oversees the discussions at the Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore. Model provisions have been developed and discussed for some years that will push forward the formalised protection and recognition of TK and TCE for WIPO members, which includes all ASEAN Member States. While decisions and policies put forward by the IGC may generate successful long-term solutions, legal change often needs to be faster. Therefore, governments, indigenous and traditional communities, and non-governmental organisations have often had to rely on more flexible approaches to ensure that TK and TCE are promoted in ways beneficial to traditional communities.

For example, the collaboration between the Bali Provincial Government and the Dior Fashion House demonstrates the proactiveness of a local government in ASEAN. Endek fabric, a woven cloth from Bali that falls under the broader categorisation of Batik fabric, has been long-famed for its intricate design and handmade weaving style, passed down through generations since the 18th century. Dwindling interest in the product due to plagiarism and reduced bargaining power had resulted in the reduction of Endek producers until Dior took an interest in the famed fabric. With Dior seeking to feature Endek fabrics in their Spring/Summer 2021 collection, the Bali Provincial Government sprung to action to oversee the collaboration and ensure that traditional Endek producers were protected. The local government supported Dior's use of Endek fabrics on the condition that the fashion house respected intellectual property rights and sourced the textile only from Balinese weavers.

Photo Credit: *©LUCAS BARIOULET / Getty Images*

In a post on one of its social media accounts, Dior stated, "Dior is committed to working side by side with local craftsmen to preserve local cultural assets and ensure that the techniques used are well preserved." The result was an ideal collaboration that safeguarded the traditional cultural expression and its producers while promoting the product through one of the world's biggest fashion brands, revitalising the Endek weaving industry.
The partnership of Endek fabric producers and Dior shows that good practices can still be executed when existing protection mechanisms are insufficient. It requires extra intervention to ensure the protection of indigenous groups and that their practices are effective.

Towards effective regional cooperation in traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions

Given that the decisions of the IGC have yet to be finalised and that protection mechanisms for TK and TCE still vary from country to country, ASEAN has independently begun its journey towards creating a regional environment that effectively protects and promotes TK and TCE for the benefit of the involved parties. Under the ASEAN IPR Action Plan 2016–2025, four specific initiatives related to TK and TCE include comparative legal studies, the development of national guidelines and laws, the development of TK databases, and the implementation of regional cooperation agreements and codes of conduct. While governments worldwide are waiting for guidance from WIPO on protection mechanisms for TK and TCE, ASEAN has ensured it will not be left behind when the decisions arrive through the cooperation undertaken under the ASEAN IPR Action Plan.

The ASEAN Working Group on Intellectual Property Cooperation (AWGIPC) discussions have already resulted in the emergence of best practices from the ASEAN region. It is expected that more will continue to develop as Member States increasingly display their rich cultural heritage and the corresponding derivative products. ASEAN is home to 650 million people, with over 1,000 native languages, 4.5 million square kilometres of land, and countless cultural treasures that have yet to be discovered and appreciated.

This article has shown that while the intellectual property system can play a role in unlocking the potential of TK and TCE for indigenous groups and their respective government stakeholders, the system as currently presented is insufficient in protecting traditional and indigenous rights-holders, and maximising the potential of their outputs. More work must be done to formalise the definitions and scopes of protection for TK and TCE so that indigenous groups can market their products and still be assured that they are appropriately protected. Due to the current protection mechanisms' insufficiencies, most TK and TCE success stories were realised through significant government interventions and additional layers of legal protection.

ASEAN is on track to address these insufficiencies through increased regional cooperation. It is hoped that more success stories will continue to emanate from the region and that a more robust legal framework will eventually emerge to complement this regional cooperation.

Cải Lương is a traditional Vietnamese folk opera which has benefitted from an expanded form of copyright protection. The copyright protection ensured by the Vietnamese government has allowed for collaboration between traditional Cải Lương performers and modern theatre houses. (Image for illustrative purposes only)

Photo Credit: ©Quang nguyen vinh / Shutterstock

Lamphun silk is one of ASEAN's most successfully commercialized traditional knowledge products, benefitting from a comprehensive scope of protection that includes geographical indication registration and multiple forms of protection and benefit sharing for traditional weavers. (Image for illustrative purposes only)

Photo Credit: ©neo2620 / Shutterstock

References may be accessed through this link: https://bit.ly/Issue32_Ref

Culture, a Transformative Force for Sustainable Development

Paving the Way for a Standalone Goal in the Post-2030 Agenda

Ernesto Ottone R.
UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture

Photo Credit: *©UNESCO / Christelle Alix, Peera_stockfoto / Shutterstock*

UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development—MONDIACULT took place in Mexico in September 2022

Photo Credit: *©MONDIACULT 2022 / Flickr*

An upward trajectory on culture's transformative impact for development

In the face of complex, multifaceted, and interconnected global challenges, the transformational role of culture for sustainable development has gained particular traction. National and local governments worldwide are increasingly harnessing culture to achieve sustainable development objectives across the public policy spectrum, from education, job creation and social inclusion to climate action, peacebuilding and urban sustainability, among other targets. The inclusion of culture has proven critical to ensuring context-relevant, rights-based, and inclusive sustainable development models, encompassing the intrinsic diversity of societies and supporting the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

This upward momentum on culture and sustainable development was strongly expressed by UNESCO Member States at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development–MONDIACULT in Mexico in September 2022. Its Ministerial Declaration acknowledged culture's transformative role across all aspects of sustainable development and positioned culture as a global public good, reinvigorating global solidarity through multilateralism and explicitly calling for culture's integration as a specific goal in its own right in the development agenda beyond 2030. The Declaration also underlined strategic areas of policy engagement for the future, from harnessing culture for climate action and conflict mitigation and supporting the promotion of cultural rights to enabling the adaptation of culture to the digital transformation or sustaining the creative economy, among others.

The declaration also called for the establishment, from 2025 onwards, of a World Forum on Cultural Policies, to be organised by UNESCO every four years. The debates of the forum will be informed by a World Report on Cultural Policies which the organisation will produce.

Beyond MONDIACULT 2022, culture's transformative impact on societies as a whole is now widely recognised, not only within the United Nations system but also in major global policy fora and at the regional level. Culture-related commitments have been explicitly featured in political declarations endorsed at heads of State or ministerial levels throughout 2023 by the G20, the G77+China, or the BRICS Summit, among others. Likewise, ASEAN, alongside the African Union, the Pacific Community (SPC), Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), and Coordinación Educativa y Cultural Centroamericana–El Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (CECC-SICA), have stepped up their policy commitments to integrate culture as a critical enabler of inclusive, sustainable development. UNESCO welcomes ASEAN's longstanding commitment towards fostering countries' engagement with the culture sector and sustaining intercultural dialogue.

A strong policy engagement on culture and sustainable development in ASEAN countries

ASEAN Member States are particularly committed to strengthening their cultural policy frameworks and leveraging culture for sustainable development prospects. Across the sub-region, safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage as well indigenous languages and cultures are core areas of focus, complemented by a robust commitment to the ratification and implementation of UNESCO Culture Conventions and Recommendations and growing interest in the creative economy, the development of museums, and the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property. In this context, ASEAN Member States' support for the creation of a virtual museum of stolen cultural property by 2025 is expected in order to reinforce the research of the provenance of pieces.

The active participation of ASEAN countries in MONDIACULT 2022 allowed UNESCO to better capture countries' priorities and trends. Across the sub-region, the transformative role of culture for collective and individual well-being is increasingly acknowledged and enshrined as a pillar of national development plans in a growing number of countries. Harnessing culture for social cohesion and dialogue, exploring sustainable patterns of cultural tourism, or enhancing the role of culture and traditional knowledge to support climate action and disaster risk

reduction are receiving growing interest, opening opportunities to further anchor culture in sustainable development planning.

Enhancing the role of culture for social inclusion, dialogue and peace-building is also reported as a major priority across the region, one which is directly supported by ASEAN, notably in relation to harnessing the multicultural features of the region or supporting nation-building or post-conflict reconciliation efforts. The safeguarding of culture and the promotion of cultural rights are outlined as privileged channels to tackle social and economic inequalities and to foster the inclusion of vulnerable groups, notably indigenous peoples or persons with disabilities.

Addressing the digital divide and fostering access to culture for all was equally underlined by ASEAN countries as a critical target, with a view to ensuring the preservation of cultural diversity and multiple cultural identities, while also harnessing the benefits of the digital transformation for the cultural sector. Strengthening intellectual property frameworks, expanding the socio-economic rights of artists, and further integrating culture in national digital transformation policies were notably highlighted as crucial.

Finally, countries of the sub-region are increasingly engaged in expanding culture and arts education and integrating culture in curricula in formal, non-formal and informal education—including education for sustainable development—thus shaping integrated strategies and policies that anchor the cultural dimension in and across educational systems. The sub-region is particularly engaged in leveraging cultural diversity, while also supporting youth employment in the cultural and creative industries. In the run up to the UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 13-15 February 2024), this commitment will be particularly critical, notably as regards the implementation of the new UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education which is to be adopted by Ministers of Education and Culture at the Conference, whereby the commitment of ASEAN and its Member States will be instrumental.

Prioritising culture is crucial for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and defining the post-2030 international agenda (Image for illustrative purposes only)

Photo Credit: ©*waktupukul11 / Shutterstock*

Anchoring culture in the post-2030 agenda: Towards and beyond the Summit of the Future

The absence of a sustainable development goal dedicated to culture within the 2030 Agenda has led to significant hurdles in SDG implementation and localisation. Culture was underlined as a major implementation gap to be addressed in the UN Secretary-General's report, *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Rescue Plan for People and Planet*, stressing that the cultural capital in its rich diversity, as enshrined in the cultural resources of each country, serves as a source of knowledge, values and communication, as a contributor to environmental sustainability and as a generator of economic activity and jobs, as well as a resource for intercultural dialogue and understanding which are crucial inroads to strengthening social cohesion and sustaining peace.

Greater inclusion of culture's central role in advancing sustainable development has thus become critical to effectively achieve the objectives set by the UN Sustainable Development Agenda and to shape the international development agenda post-2030. In that context, UNESCO is building a trajectory towards the inclusion of culture in the Pact for the Future as the main Outcome Document of the Summit of the Future (New York, USA, 22-23 September 2024), which will shape the foundations of the post-2030 agenda. In alignment with the UN Secretary General's *Our Common Agenda*, culture's inclusion in the post-2030 Agenda will be crucial to forge context-relevant, inclusive, and people-centred sustainable development models, building on the UN pillars of human rights and international peace and security.

The rich diversity and multifaceted experience in ASEAN countries and ASEAN convening power will be critical to inform and support such global advocacy on culture as a standalone development goal, particularly as part of the Member State-led negotiations that are foreseen to unfold from January 2024 onward. UNESCO stands ready to support ASEAN and its Member States moving forward with a view to further anchor culture at the heart of their sustainable development strategies and policies.

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UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Cambodia

Kun Lbokator

This traditional martial art form aims at developing one's mental and physical strength, and building discipline through self-defence techniques and a philosophy of non-violence.

Royal ballet of Cambodia

Also known as Khmer classical dance is known for its elegant hand gestures and elaborate costumes. It is performed during royal ceremonies and events, including coronations, marriages, funerals, and Khmer holidays.

Sbek Thom, Khmer shadow theatre

The theatre features two-meter-high leather openwork puppets, initially dedicated to divinities on specific occasions but later transformed into an artistic form.

Lao PDR

Traditional craft of Naga motif weaving in Lao communities

The intricate Naga motifs are hand woven into silk, silk organza, or cotton textiles using a traditional wooden loom, rooted in the belief of Lao communities that the Naga are ancestors who watch over them.

Khaen music of the Lao people

Khaen, a bamboo mouth organ with varying-length tubes, is played during village festivals, fostering active participation from listeners while promoting family and social cohesion.

Philippines

Darangen epic of the Maranao people of Lake Lanao

Darangen is an ancient epic song of the Maranao people from the Mindanao region that celebrates their history and mythical heroes while exploring themes of life, death, courtship, love, and politics.

Hudhud chants of the Ifugao

Hudhud consists of narrative chants performed by the Ifugao community during rice-sowing season, harvest time, and funerals.

Aklan piña handloom weaving

Piña, a delicate and silky textile crafted from pineapple leaf fibers, is intricately woven using a handloom and traditionally used in making a formal attire like the barong tagalog.

Gamelan

Gamelan music is performed by a traditional Indonesian percussion orchestra using hand-forged metal instruments including xylophones, gongs, drums, cymbals, and bamboo flutes.

Traditions of pencak silat

Pencak silat is a group of martial arts that incorporates mental-spiritual, self-defence, and artistic elements, with moves influenced by various art forms and a unity of body and movement.

Indonesian kris

The kris is a dagger characterised by narrow blades with a wide base and adorned sheaths, worn by both men and women, and serves everyday ceremonial purposes.

Pinisi, the art of boatbuilding in South Sulawesi

Pinisi includes the rig and sail of the renowned Sulawesi schooner, representing a millennia-old tradition of Austronesian boatbuilding and navigation.

Indonesian angklung

Angklung is an Indonesian musical instrument with two to four bamboo tubes suspended in a bamboo frame. It is played by shaking or tapping to produce notes, typically during rice planting and harvesting ceremonies.

Indonesia

Indonesian batik

The Indonesian batik refers to hand-dyed cotton and silk garments adorned with rich patterns that reflect various influences and serve diverse purposes from infancy to everyday wear and other special occasions.

Three genres of traditional dance in Bali

Traditional Balinese dance encompasses three genres—sacred, semi-sacred, and for community enjoyment. Male and female dancers, adorned in vibrant costumes with gold floral and faunal motifs, along with gold-leafed and jewelled accessories, perform this dance.

Jamu wellness culture

Jamu is a form of herbal medicine and treatment practised in Indonesia since the eighth century, based on the belief of creating a harmonious balance between hot and cold elements within the body.

Wayang puppet theatre

This ancient form of storytelling features three-dimensional wooden puppets and flat leather shadow puppets, both manipulated by a master puppeteer. It is accompanied by singers and musicians playing complex melodies on bronze instruments and gamelan drums.

Malaysia

Songket

Songket is a traditional Malaysian handwoven fabric crafted by women using a decorative technique, inserting gold or silver thread between the base threads on a traditional floor loom.

Ong Chun/Wangchuan/Wangkang ceremony, rituals, and related practices

The ceremony involves seaside gatherings to welcome Ong Yah, a deity believed to protect people and their lands from disasters to temples or clan halls.

Silat

A combative self-defence and survival art with more than 150 known styles inspired by human anatomy, nature, and animals and originally practised by warriors for justice.

Dondang Sayang

Dondang Sayang, is a traditional Malay art practised by four communities in Melaka which combines music, songs, and chants, historically performed at Royal Palace ceremonies during the 15th century.

Mak Yong theatre

Mak Yong is an ancient theatre form that combines acting, vocal and instrumental music, and gestures to tell stories from Malay folk tales.

Viet Nam

Art of Xòe dance of the Tai people in Viet Nam

Xòe is a form of Vietnamese dance with movements that symbolise human activities in ritual, culture, life, and work, typically performed at rituals, weddings, village festivals, and community events.

Practices related to the Viet beliefs in the Mother Goddesses of Three Realms

The traditional practice involves daily worship and participation in ceremonies and rituals dedicated to the Mother Goddesses of Three Realms (heaven, water, mountains and forests) for good health and success.

Ví and Giặm folk songs of Nghệ Tĩnh

Ví and Giặm songs, sung by a wide range of communities in Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces of Viet Nam, focus on key values and virtues, including respect for parents, loyalty, care and devotion, the importance of honesty and a good heart in the maintenance of village customs and traditions.

The art of Bài Chòi in Central Viet Nam

The art of Bài Chòi in Central Viet Nam is a diverse art combining music, poetry, acting, painting, and literature that takes two main forms, Bài Chòi games and Bài Chòi performance.

Nha Nhac, Vietnamese court music

Nha Nhac, meaning “elegant music,” refers to a broad range of musical and dance styles performed at the Vietnamese royal court from the fifteenth to the mid-twentieth century.

Xoan singing of Phú Tho province, Viet Nam

Xoan singing includes singing, dancing, drumming, and clapper beating, linked to the worship of the Hung Kings, a belief rooted in the ancestor worship practice of the Vietnamese people.

Practices of Then by Tày, Nùng and Thái ethnic groups in Viet Nam

Then, an essential ritual practice in the spiritual life of the Tày, Nùng and Thái ethnic groups in Viet Nam, reflects concepts about human beings, the natural world, and the universe.

Art of Đõn ca tài tù music and song in southern Viet Nam

Đờn ca tài tử music and songs evoke the people’s life and work on the land and rivers of the Mekong Delta region, usually performed at festivals, death anniversary rituals, and celebrations.

Worship of Hùng kings in Phú Tho

The worship involves converging on the Hùng temple at Nghĩa Lĩnh mountain in Phú Thọ province to commemorate their ancestors and pray for good weather, abundant harvests, good luck, and good health, and celebrating the ancestral anniversary festival of the Hùng Kings for about one week at the beginning of the third lunar month.

Gióng festival of Phù Đông and Sóc temples

The Gióng festival of Phù Đổng and Sóc temples is celebrated annually to honour the mythical hero, god and saint, Thánh Gióng, who is credited with defending the country from foreign enemies and is worshipped as the patron god of the harvest, national peace and family prosperity.

Quan Ho Băc Ninh folk songs

The folk songs, composed of more than 400 song lyrics and with 213 different melody variations, express people’s longing and sadness upon separation and the happiness of meeting lovers.

Space of gong culture

The cultural space of the gongs covers several provinces and ethno-linguistic communities in the central highlands of Viet Nam who believe that gongs produce a privileged language between men, divinities, and the supernatural world.

Singapore

Hawker culture

Hawker centres serve as community dining rooms where people from diverse backgrounds gather and share the experience of dining over breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Thailand

Nora, dance drama in southern Thailand

Nora is a lively and acrobatic form of dance theatre, with improvisational singing, that tells stories based on the former lives of Buddha or about legendary heroes.

Nuad Thai, traditional Thai massage

Nuad Thai involves bodily manipulation in which the practitioner helps rebalance the patient's body, energy, and structure to treat illnesses believed to be caused by the obstruction of energy flow.

Khon, masked dance drama in Thailand

Khon is a performing art combining musical, vocal, literary, dance, ritual, and handicraft elements to depict the glory of Rama, the incarnation of the god Vishnu, who brings order and justice to the world.

Songkran in Thailand, traditional Thai New Year festival

Songkran, celebrated in mid-April after the rice harvest, is an occasion for Thai people to reunite with their families and pay their respects to older adults, ancestors, and sacred Buddha images.

Multi-country

Indonesia-Malaysia

Pantun

Pantun is a form of Malay verse, prevalent in maritime Southeast Asia for at least 500 years, that focuses on themes such as love, family, community, and nature.

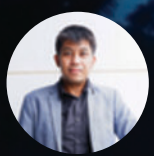
Cambodia-Philippines-Viet Nam-Republic of Korea

Tugging rituals and games

Tugging rituals and games are enacted in the rice-farming communities of East Asia and Southeast Asia, promoting social solidarity, providing entertainment, and marking the start of a new agricultural cycle.

Source: UNESCO. (n.d.). Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices (as of 2023). Retrieved from https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists

Envisioning the ASEAN Cultural Heritage List



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Southeast Asia, a region celebrated for its vibrant tapestry of cultures, languages, and histories, stands at the cusp of a significant cultural milestone. The proposal for the ASEAN Cultural Heritage List (ACHL) emerges from a recognition of the region's unique cultural landscape and the need for its preservation. This article delves into the current discussions about the formulation of the ACHL, addresses key aspects of its formation, and summarises the ongoing discussions shaping its future.

The inception of the ASEAN Cultural Heritage List

Global lists like those maintained by the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO), while monumental, often overlook the nuanced and region-specific aspects of cultural heritage. For example, while there are 1,199 World Heritage Sites around the world, Southeast Asia only accounts for 45 sites or just under 4 per cent. Considering that ASEAN countries are collectively the world's third largest population, this makes the region under-represented in the premier list of heritage sites. This proportion is slightly better with intangible cultural heritage elements, which stand at just under 8 per cent.

The idea of the ACHL was born out of a need to address these regional disparities and foster a stronger ASEAN identity. One criticism of the UNESCO lists is its emphasis on "Outstanding Universal Value," usually proposed by individual state parties, which can obscure equally significant but no less outstanding "Regional" values, represented by various forms of shared heritage found across the region. For example, Thailand and Cambodia have forms of masked dance drama listed in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, even though they are two sides of the same coin.

The richness of the ASEAN region's heritage is further exemplified by the widespread Hindu-Buddhist architectural influence, a testament to the ancient and enduring impact of Indic religions across Southeast Asia. This architectural heritage, dating back to the early centuries CE, not only signifies a shared historical narrative but also showcases unique local adaptations. While numerous sites like Angkor Wat, Borobudur, My Son Sanctuary, Bagan, Prambanan, and Ayutthaya have individually garnered recognition as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, their collective significance often remains underappreciated. The ACHL could play a pivotal role in unifying these sites under a regional heritage umbrella. This unification would not only acknowledge their individual beauty and historical value but also celebrate their contribution to a collective ASEAN narrative—one that intertwines Indic religious influences with local and regional adaptations, reflecting a complex tapestry of shared yet distinct cultural and historical identities.

The ACHL aims to fill the gaps left by global heritage lists and create a more inclusive and representative platform for ASEAN's cultural heritage. The ASEAN region, with its rich heritage, requires a tailored approach to preservation, one that respects and promotes its diverse cultural expressions.

Preserving cultural diversity

The ACHL is envisioned as a mechanism to promote the region's tangible and intangible heritage, through a platform that not only

recognises but actively promotes the diverse cultural assets of ASEAN countries. This includes the rich agricultural heritage of the region, exemplified by the practice of rice terracing. While UNESCO has recognized specific instances, such as the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras and the Subak system of Bali on the World Heritage List and Intangible Cultural Heritage List respectively, there is a broader regional narrative to be told. Countries like Viet Nam and Malaysia also share this practice, reflecting a common agricultural tradition across Southeast Asia. Recognising these rice terracing systems as part of the ACHL could serve as a way to promote sustainable agricultural practices, highlighting the interconnectedness of culture, environment, and sustainable development.

This recognition goes beyond mere preservation. It is about celebrating the region's shared history and values, as echoed in the "Narrative of ASEAN Identity" from the 2020 ASEAN Summit. The ACHL by bringing these practices into the limelight, acknowledges their cultural significance and underscores their role in fostering a sustainable future. This initiative, therefore, is not just about preserving the past; it is about nurturing a sustainable and culturally rich future for ASEAN.

Primary considerations for inscribing cultural properties

Inscribing cultural properties and practices onto the ACHL necessitates a nuanced understanding of their regional value, authenticity, and representativeness. Take, for instance, the rich shadow puppetry tradition that spans Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Thailand. This art form is particularly significant as it transcends the ocean barrier between Mainland and Island Southeast Asia, symbolising a cultural bridge within the region. Despite variations in style and performance, these countries share a common tradition in using puppets made from skins, showcasing a remarkable unity in craftsmanship.

More than just a form of entertainment, shadow puppetry plays an integral role in community life. It serves not only as a traditional mode of storytelling but also as a vibrant medium for transmitting knowledge and reflecting popular culture. The performances often centre around the Ramayana story, a common cultural thread that binds these diverse practices. This shared narrative, similar to the masked dances previously mentioned, demonstrates the profound cultural connection across these ASEAN countries.

These shared aspects of shadow puppetry, including its cross-regional reach, common material use, role in community engagement, and portrayal of shared mythological narratives, make it an exemplary candidate for consideration in the ACHL. It embodies the very essence of what the List seeks to preserve and promote: a heritage that is deeply rooted in regional traditions, yet resonant across diverse ASEAN communities.

A key focus in developing the ACHL has been to distinctly differentiate it from similar recognition systems, especially the UNESCO lists. Diverging from UNESCO's emphasis on universal value, the ACHL is uniquely poised to prioritise regional value and identity. This shift represents a move towards a more ASEAN-centric view of cultural heritage, one that foregrounds regional cooperation and solidarity. To further this distinction, early discussions around the ACHL have proposed a bottom-up approach to heritage recognition. This involves including indigenous voices and perspectives at the forefront, ensuring that heritage is seen through the lens of those who live and preserve it daily.

Furthermore, there is a conscious effort to move away from the conventional divisions of heritage into tangible and intangible categories. Instead, the ACHL aims to recognise heritage in a more holistic manner, understanding that cultural expressions often transcend such bifurcations. This approach acknowledges the fluidity and interconnectedness of cultural elements, reflecting a more authentic representation of ASEAN's cultural diversity.

An additional emphasis seen in the current discussions about the ACHL is the strong focus on sustainability—not just in the protection of cultural elements but also in their transmission to future generations. This approach ensures that heritage preservation is not just about safeguarding the past but is also about fostering a living, evolving cultural legacy. Through these considerations, the ACHL aspires to create a cultural heritage framework that is inclusive, dynamic, and reflective of the ASEAN region's unique cultural landscape.

Ongoing discussions and future progress

The journey towards conceptualising the ACHL reached a significant milestone with the inaugural Experts Meeting held on 16th August 2023, supported by the Indian Mission to ASEAN. This foundational meeting set the stage for the ACHL, identifying key challenges and opportunities. Among the primary challenges discussed was establishing a robust, shared definition of cultural heritage within ASEAN, integrating both tangible and intangible aspects. The discussions also highlighted the need for a balanced approach to heritage conservation. This involves not just the preservation of cultural sites but also the fostering of sustainable development within the region. The emphasis was on creating a system that supports both the protection and the ongoing, living transmission of cultural heritage.

At the time of writing, the feasibility of the ACHL is still in its early stages. With only one experts' meeting completed so far and a second meeting imminent, there is a sense of anticipation and forward momentum. Further discussions are planned, with at least one more experts' meeting on the horizon, along with a session involving a working group. These upcoming meetings aim to refine and build upon the ideas and frameworks presented thus far.

The road ahead for the ACHL is filled with opportunities and challenges. As the discussions continue and the List evolves, it holds the promise to safeguard cultural heritage and unite the ASEAN Community more closely. The journey towards realising the ACHL is as exciting as it is necessary, offering a chance to showcase the ASEAN region's rich cultural tapestry to the world and celebrate the unique cultural narratives that bind the ASEAN countries together.

Note: A study on the feasibility of the ACHL is underway, with support from the government of India through the ASEAN-India Fund.

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ASEAN-ROK Cooperation

Directions and Significance of 'Shared Heritage' Cooperation Projects

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As a key partner and close neighbour of ASEAN, the Republic of Korea (ROK) is committed to strategic and collaborative efforts relating to cultural heritage.

> "(We) looked forward to sustaining collaboration in the protection, preservation, and promotion of cultural heritage.

This phrase was included in the Chairman's Statement at the 24th ASEAN-ROK Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, in September 2023. During the Summit, the South Korean President reiterated Korea's unwavering support for ASEAN Centrality and KASI (Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative) following last year's ASEAN-ROK Summit. For South Korea, ASEAN is now considered a key cooperative partner and close neighbour, and "cultural heritage" has become an area of cooperation, as emphasised at the ASEAN-ROK Summit.

"Shared heritage" to be the first subject of ASEAN-ROK cooperation

The Chairman's Statement above also highlights the outcome of the 2nd Meeting (May, Indonesia) of the ASEAN-ROK Working Committee on Cultural Heritage Cooperation (from now on "Working Committee"), the first ASEAN-ROK Working Committee on Cultural Heritage, which was established in November last year by 24 cultural heritage and international cooperation officers from the ROK, ASEAN Member States, and the ASEAN Secretariat.

The Working Committee provisionally identified "shared heritage" as the theme for the first cooperation project between ASEAN and the ROK at the 2nd Meeting in Jakarta in May. The content of "shared heritage," the subject of this cooperation project, is based on intangible heritage. Currently, the ROK, ASEAN, and the ASEAN Secretariat are discussing specific project directions focusing on the rice culture, which is also the symbol of the ASEAN flag. In addition to the rice culture, the 2nd Meeting discussed maritime heritage, underwater heritage, craft such as lacquer craft and food culture as candidates for shared heritage.

The contemporary meaning of heritage and ASEAN-ROK cooperation

Our ancestors' legacy of the past, including intangible heritage, has a contemporary meaning and value—as a medium to connect the present and future generations and make them appreciate heritage. As shown by the examples of Angkor in Cambodia and Hong Nang Sida in the Lao PDR, both of which the ROK has participated in preserving, well-preserved cultural heritage sites that have tremendous economic value as representative tourist destinations. The same is true for intangible heritage. For example, the Korean Cultural Heritage Administration is working with the Kyrgyz Republic to build a transmission environment for traditional crafts in Kyrgyzstan (such as establishing traditional crafts facilities), which is expected to help reduce poverty and revitalise the local economy. As such, the preservation and revitalisation

of cultural tangible and intangible heritage can be considered the key driver of sustainable development in the present and future. Moreover, the commercial utilisation and sustainable development of cultural heritage has been emphasised and mentioned in the ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage 2000, the Strategic Plan for Culture and Arts 2016-2025, and the Vientiane Declaration 2016.

Heritage is also a medium for communication between nations. Cooperation in heritage has a special place in the international community. Using heritage as a medium between the past, present, and future sets it apart from other sectors. As an object with a past and a future, heritage is recognised as the most potent medium for strengthening solidarity among partner countries. Therefore, more than any other field, cooperation in heritage is a powerful means to connect Korea and the 10 ASEAN Member States culturally and historically.

The meaning of shared heritage in ASEAN-ROK cooperation

UNESCO recognises the joint inscriptions of intangible cultural heritage based on the understanding that heritage is a legacy from the past rather than a commodity. It also acknowledges the potential for sharing heritage among peoples and countries. The case of tugging rituals and games is one example. It was jointly registered as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by Cambodia, the Philippines, Viet Nam, and the Republic of Korea in 2015. Although there are differences in rope-making methods, performance time, and detailed procedures of the game across different countries, the core of the tug-of-war lies in the shared understanding that it represents a traditional culture praying for prosperity, particularly in rice farming nations. In addition, the value of the shared heritage of tugging rituals and games lies in the regional characteristics of the game, which is widely practised in East and Southeast Asian cultures, and the aspects of the game that promote community enrichment and security through harmony and unity among members.

The concept of shared heritage, in which countries jointly promote its transmission, and the discovery of shared heritage in ASEAN align with ASEAN's motto, "One Vision, One Identity, One Community." Furthermore, the Vientiane Declaration on Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Cooperation in ASEAN, dated 6 September 2016, cites intangible heritage as a mean of communicating ASEAN values and solidarity and as a subject for research on cultural interconnections in the ASEAN region. For these reasons, we would like to focus on the heritage shared, especially intangible heritage, as the subject of the first cooperation project of the Working Committee.

Safeguarding intangible heritage: Core tasks

Safeguarding intangible heritage requires a different approach than tangible cultural heritage. While the principle of heritage protection is to keep pagodas, palace sites, old paintings, and ceramics as they were at the time of their creation in their original state, intangible heritage such as lacquer craft skills, use the expression "transmission" rather than "preservation," and a legal concept of protecting the "archetype" rather than the "original state" in Korea. This resulted from policies that recognise the changing nature of intangible heritage, which naturally evolves over time. Unlike tangible cultural heritage, which is safeguarded as it was created and utilised in modern times, the common challenge for safeguarding intangible heritage is to (i) create a "transmission environment" where traditional dances, songs, rituals, and skills can continue to be passed down to succeeding generations; and (ii) raise awareness of intangible heritage.

To fulfil our shared challenges in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, we envision the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Program in the following three directions. The project will begin by researching and identifying specific subjects of the shared heritage by ASEAN and Korea. The project will then establish a digital archive utilising in-depth research on the shared heritage of ASEAN and Korea to the international community through digital content creation and exhibitions. Thirdly, it will provide capacity-building programmes to educate ASEAN youth on utilising the shared heritage. The project plan introduced here will be revised and supplemented through an agreement with ASEAN at the 3rd Meeting of the Working Committee, scheduled in Chiang Rai, Thailand, in December 2023.

In implementing the shared heritage cooperation projects, it will be necessary to cooperate and coordinate with various fields, such as education, science, tourism, and environment, in addition to intangible and tangible cultural heritage. These fields are all closely related to heritage, and related networks have already been formed in Korea, such as education for human capacity building, cultural heritage disaster prevention, cultural heritage preservation science, tourism resource utilisation of cultural heritage. Know-how has been accumulated to a certain extent on the direction of collaboration with other fields as a methodology for preserving and utilising heritage centred on heritage. It is expected that the Working Committee can use this accumulated know-how.

Through this shared heritage activities, the ASEAN Member States are expected to strengthen their cultural identity and solidarity, internal cohesion, and eventually the ASEAN Centrality. In addition, if ASEAN and Korea can find common ground through heritage, the solidarity between ASEAN and Korea can be further strengthened through the transmission of shared heritage, and we hope to join this meaningful process and effort in the name of Korea and the ASEAN-ROK Working Committee on Cultural Heritage Cooperation.

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Cultural Currents

Tracing ASEAN's Water and Sanitation Heritage

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Water and sanitation management presents many challenges and opportunities in the ASEAN region. This article explores the current state of the sector and link practices rooted in traditions with policy initiatives in selected countries, shaping the sector's present and future.

The rapid growth of the urban population in Asia and the Pacific raises the importance of a proper water and sanitation system and facilities. With the population growing almost five-fold fast over the past five decades, up to 3.4 billion people could be living in water-stressed areas of Asia by 2050 (Development Asia, 2023). This very dynamic and fast-growing region needs proper management of resources and infrastructure development commitments to address water and sanitation deficits.

Sanitation is often given less attention even though evidence shows that the presence of an appropriate infrastructure is of critical importance to human health and the economic well-being of nations. Examples from Asian countries such as Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam indicate a larger potential economic benefit from improved sanitation: a dollar invested in sanitation yields at least a fivefold return in increased productivity (Kelkar & KE Seetha Ram, 2019).

In the dynamic landscape of developing Asian countries, the ASEAN region stands out with its unique context, where cultural heritage and traditional practices play a significant role in water and sanitation management. Integrating these practices into modern frameworks can lead to more sustainable and inclusive solutions, as shown by countries in the region that have adopted these practices. It is crucial to address the challenges in managing water resources effectively and provide access to safe water and sanitation services for all.

Examining diverse cultural narratives surrounding water and sanitation in ASEAN countries provides a rich tapestry of insights for crafting policies that honour traditional practices while addressing contemporary water and sanitation challenges. We will examine tangible examples from Viet Nam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Additionally, we will showcase how India has influenced water management practices in Southeast Asian countries.

Indonesia: Subak System in Bali

In Indonesia, the Balinese society practices "Subak," an age-old collaborative and participatory local

water allocation system for irrigation (Kitaoka, 2005). Subak represents a one-of-a-kind system that is not present elsewhere in the world. Water from springs and canals flows through temples and onto the rice fields. This system involves 1200 water collectives of 50-400 farmers who work together to manage water supply from a single source. These farmers are able to carry out terraced rice farming without using pesticides or fertilisers. UNESCO recognised this sustainable system, inscribing Subak on the World Cultural Heritage list in 2012.

The *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy guides many aspects of Balinese culture, including the Subak system, particularly irrigation regulation, cropping patterns and soil and water conservation practices. This philosophy, which is rooted in harmony and togetherness, enables the irrigation management system to anticipate and adjust for deviations. Subak system managed water for terraced rice fields collectively. After replacement with the green revolution approach, several social and economic challenges were raised, along with other chaotic conditions in water management, but the Subak community has gradually returned to practices to restore the original wisdom concepts (Risna et al., 2022).

Viet Nam: Water Culture

The "Water Culture" in Viet Nam explains the profound cultural and societal ties between communities and water bodies. Settlements have historically been established near water sources for trade and housing, engendering a sense of familiarity through generations. The country has relied primarily on surface flows of rivers and aquifers, particularly the Red River and the Mekong River, locally known as the Hong River and Cuu Long River. To date, however, the country's water resource usage is under pressure due to the increased demands for irrigation and urban and industrial usage with an increasing population (ODV, 2018).

Climate change concerns are impacting clean water availability in the Mekong River basin. This area accounts for around 12 per cent of the country's entire land, producing about 40 per cent of agricultural output. The Mekong Delta Water Management for Rural Development project was implemented to protect and enhance the water resources in the provinces of Can Tho, Soc Trang, Hau Giang, An Giang, Kien Giang, Ca Mau, and Bac Lieu in the Mekong Delta region. The International Development Association (IDA) and local partners aimed to enhance the agricultural productivity of local farmers, providing access to water supply for rural households, climate change adaptation and resilience. Approximately 215,000 farming households benefited from better irrigation services, prevention of salinity intrusion, and flood risk management, enabling agricultural production on 104,864 hectares of land. From a community perspective, the project encouraged women's participation in pest management training, enhancing their access to the agricultural sector. Additionally, the project entailed a partnership with the Women's Union aimed at increasing women's involvement in the sanitation campaign (The World Bank, 2019).

In areas with sizable ethnic minority populations like Soc Trang, Gia Lai, and Dien Bien provinces, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) are integral aspects of community well-being. Given the low incomes of communities and problems with product quality and attributes, it is essential that existing products and services become accessible to these groups. The geographic heterogeneity of these areas raises the need for a diversified approach. For instance, whereas Soc Tang is flat and easy to reach, infrastructure investment costs are relatively lower. However, in areas such as Gia Lai and Dien Bien, high elevations and mountains raise the need for more financial support.

Culturally, water resources have been an integral part of communities' lives, which means that prioritisation of adequate water supplies is also an opportunity for further development and investments. For example, research shows that communities have bottled water suppliers and community-managed piped water schemes to provide accessible and affordable water through pipes to their homes. In terms of sanitation, pit latrines with concrete slabs are the most used by communities in Soc Trang (Khmer) and the Thai EM group in Dien Bien, which creates an opportunity for further development, piloting, and testing of existing water-saving or dry latrine technologies to ensure that sanitation is not limited by a shortage of scarcity (UNICEF, 2023).

Thailand: Harmony between people and rivers

In Thailand, the relationship between people and rivers shows how water has been a life-sustaining source, providing staple foods like rice and fish and nurturing communities over centuries. The management of natural resources and the conservation of river ecology by the indigenous people in the Nhongchaiwan wetland highlights how indigenous people manage their natural resources, which can be a basis for policy formulation for natural resources management.

In northeast Thailand, Don Pu Ta is a sacred site for the community. The Don Pu Ta remains untouched, nestled in a massive forest, representing a close relationship between the indigenous people and the natural environment. Nhongchaiwan wetland is one notable example, as it is not only the largest *Cephalanthus tetrandra* freshwater swamp forest but also a place for social activities and income generation for the entire community. It highlights the importance of high recognition and inclusion of indigenous practices in the government's policies on natural resources management in locations where representatives of local communities have been living for generations (Chunhabunyatip et al, 2018).

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Malaysia: Indigenous communities

Malaysia's approach to water preservation reflects a blend of cultural and environmental stewardship. In Malaysia, water is perceived as an enigma, manifesting itself in extreme circumstances, such as floods and droughts, meaning that water management should consider both excess water and a shortage (Weng, 2004). In times of water shortage, for example, parts of Malaysia have faced significant flood problems. Even though natural conditions causing floods have been in place, uncontrolled development activities in watershed areas as well as near river corridors lead to an increased likelihood of floods (FAO, n.d.).

The recognition of clean water as a fundamental human right, along with case studies like those involving the Orang Asli communities, underscores the social and cultural dimensions of water and sanitation in the country. Orang Asli communities make up 0.7 per cent of the population in Peninsular Malaysia and represent around 60 per cent of the population in Eastern Malaysia.

Between 2003–2007, the Orang Asli infant mortality rate was double that of the national indicator, with increased mortality due to parasitic infections. Highlighting the critical importance of clean water for safeguarding health, the Global Peace Foundation has collaborated closely with Orang Asli communities to tackle these challenges.

Interactive community engagements attended by women and children, incorporating fun elements, could raise awareness among local community members about good hygiene and the importance of handwashing. Importantly, the initiative has tangible results, such as an installed pump that draws water from wells for the Orang Asli community in Kampung Binjal, which ensures that safe water is now available near the households and local community members suffer fewer health complications like diarrhoea and fever. The availability of water has significantly improved the quality of life for women. Access to clean water contributes to their well-being, health, sanitation, and empowerment. Before, they needed to be careful with water usage due to resource scarcity, but now they can use water based on their daily needs more frequently (Rhule & Thoo, 2018).

Policy frameworks leveraging cultural practices and policies of ASEAN

Various initiatives and frameworks demonstrate ASEAN's commitment to addressing water and sanitation issues. The ASCC Blueprint 2025 is a comprehensive planning framework designed to enhance the quality of life of ASEAN peoples through cooperative activities that are people-oriented, environmentally friendly cooperative activities, and geared towards sustainable development. Having sustainability as a key element of the strategy, ASEAN can ensure the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity and natural resources by enhancing policy and capacity development, adopting best practices for conservation, development, and sustainable management of marine, wetlands, peatlands, biodiversity, and land and water resources; and promoting coordination within relevant sectors for enhancing access to clean land, green public space, clean air, clean and safe water, and sanitation (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016).

Released in 2005, the ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action on Water Resources Management demonstrates a structured approach to managing water resources in the region. The ASEAN Working Group formulated the action plan on Water Resources Management (AWGWRM). The need for the region to develop the water conservation programme was initially recognised in the Hanoi Plan of Action of 1999-2004, followed by two high-level meetings of AWGWRM in 2003, acknowledging the need to integrate water sector management needs with issues such as water supply, sanitation, climate, and environmental factors (ASEAN Secretariat, 2005).

Aiming to integrate the region's unique socio-cultural context into informed policy recommendations, the ASEAN Secretariat has a dedicated Culture and Information Division (CID) that coordinates projects surrounding cultural aspects. This division collaborates with the ministries of culture of all ASEAN Member States and dialogue partners to address and promote the cultural dimension within the ASEAN framework. Furthermore, CID can also leverage its work with other divisions within the ASEAN Secretariat, notably the Environment Division, which holds the portfolio to manage collaboration with the Ministry of Environment from all ASEAN Member Countries. This multifaceted approach underscores the importance of integrating sociocultural considerations in regional dialogues and initiatives, including those related to water and sanitation. Central to these efforts is the emphasis on cross-sectoral work, which is key to ensuring a positive impact on the region.

Water management practices in India

India's socio-cultural values in water management are well-expressed in several traditional practices. For instance, the Bamboo Drip Irrigation System has proven effective in areas with water scarcity, characterised by poor soil and rocky topography. The system enables precise water delivery to crops, eliminating unnecessary water loss.

Another example of such a system is Zabo, practised in Nagaland in north-eastern India, which consists of a protected forest land situated at the top of the hill, water-harvesting tanks in the middle, and cattle yard and paddy fields at the bottom side. Another interesting system is Oorani, which is based on the daily living aspects of villages in southern India. Every village had more than three water bodies to meet the needs of drinking, farming, cattle, and birds. Water reservoirs in the form of oranges held precisely the amount of water for irrigation of the designated few acres of land. The orange water was especially beneficial for women

> The Bamboo Drip Irrigation System has proven effective in areas with water scarcity, characterised by poor soil and rocky topography.

who usually consumed the water for household needs. Oorani system processes an exceptional balance of socioeconomic dimensions and coherent communities (Kapadia, 2016).

The unique attitude of the Indian people towards rivers significantly influences water irrigation systems. Historically, rivers have intrinsic socio-cultural value, like with the River Ganges (Ganga), a symbol of culture and hope and is an essential source of livelihood for the Indian people. Indigenous and local communities in India have demonstrated an extensive knowledge of their local river systems development. For example, Apatani in Arunachal Pradesh illustrates a traditional ecological knowledge of sustainable river management. The Ziro Valley, situated in the Eastern State of Arunachal Pradesh and has been inhabited since the 1100s, showcases the lasting heritage of the Apatani tribe. A unique practice showcasing the deep understanding of water management, river conservation, and traditional wisdom of the Apathani tribe is paddy-cum-fish cultivation, which serves to grow rice and nurture fish in submerged fields harmoniously. Wetland rice cultivation is executed on constructed terraces, called Agher, made from bamboo and wood and designed to contain water and maintain nutrient-rich soils. Bamboo or wooden pipes transfer water between terraces for precise distribution of water resources. Additionally, 50-centimetre-deep trenches are excavated in the fields to provide shelter to fish shelter and serve as water reservoirs during dry seasons. This is a good example of how indigenous wisdom possesses valuable insights into sustainable resource management (Shinde et al., 2023).

The Southeast Asian region has had close cultural and geographical contact with India for centuries. For instance, in countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia, many symbolic traces of India's influence are visible in art, culture, and civilisation. As a result, India has been a source of inspiration for art and architecture in countries of current ASEAN (Sengupta, 2017). As we can see, the knowledge from India's water management practices finds relevance in the context of certain ASEAN countries, as it offers a means to preserve indigenous practices amidst the modern challenges of sustainable water management.

Conclusion

Several regional initiatives are addressing critical development issues of the region. However, there is a need for enhanced commitment and action within the ASEAN countries, which includes leveraging the cultural heritage and practices related to water and sanitation for informed policy decisions and initiatives to bridge the gap between policies and the real needs of local communities. The expedition through the cultural waterscapes of Viet Nam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia illuminate the intrinsic relationship between cultural heritage and water and sanitation practices. Additionally, examples from India show that indigenous wisdom holds valuable insights for sustainable resource management aligning with the practices in ASEAN countries.

The exploration explains a profound understanding that water is not merely a natural resource but an important cultural and societal aspect of society. By weaving the cultural narratives into modern water and sanitation frameworks, ASEAN countries have the potential to foster sustainable and harmonious water management practices. It is important to enhance the commitment and action towards better community engagement, incorporating traditional practices and behaviours into modern approaches towards better water usage, efficient and equitable distribution, and adopting norms and practices related to personal hygiene and sanitation. The region's unique sense of ownership and respect for water resources can become a driving force for mobilising more investments into infrastructure, which can be translated into tangible benefits for communities.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

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Traditional Practices in Harmony with Nature

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The Southeast Asian countries believe that sustainable social and cultural practices are urgently needed to address the challenges posed by climate change at the global, national, and local levels. The call is to revitalise our traditional practices, recognising their role in building resilience to environmental changes while preserving our rich cultural heritage. The Southeast Asian Cultural Heritage Alliance (SEACHA) encourages a deep understanding of traditional practices that harmonise with nature through the adoption of sustainable methods and inherent respect for the preservation of biodiversity.

Protecting cultural heritage in Southeast Asia

The tangible cultural heritage in Southeast Asia is rich, consisting of historical buildings, remnants of kingdoms like temples and monuments, and archaeological sites. However, these properties are vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, landslides, wildfires, or extreme weather events. To safeguard these cultural assets, it is important to identify effective solutions and foster an understanding of the practices required to preserve them.

In Southeast Asia, some communities have lived in harmony with their natural environment and have often relied on traditional wisdom to prepare for natural disasters and mitigate climate change impacts. Understanding human interactions with nature and the spiritual world and emphasising the need for harmony between humans and nature is important in preserving tangible cultural heritage in the face of climate change. Efforts are needed to find solutions to climate change impacts, which are only expected to worsen with rapid modernisation and urban development. Embracing spiritual traditions is one way to attain prosperity while combating the effects of climate change.

Traditional wisdom adds significant value to the tangible cultural heritage. While it is rooted in the past, tradition is dynamic and can be enriched or changed as they are passed down to the next generation. We risk losing our rich and unique tangible cultural heritage if not carefully preserved. Traditions are more than obligations; they represent wisdom, reflect the community's customs, and are tied to the community's beliefs in Southeast Asian countries. Understanding the history behind each tradition strengthens people's (even migrants') attachment to the community.

Meanwhile, the richness of the intangible cultural heritage is reflected in our oral traditions, languages, knowledge, skills, and practices. Some people believe that intangible cultural heritage also forms part of nature as special gift from God to support people's lives. Unfortunately, these intangible elements are threatened by the displacement, migration, or loss of identity of the communities that bear them.

We urgently need to observe sustainable social and cultural practices to counter threats to our heritage. There is a growing drive to revive traditional practices to bolster identity resilience, preserve our rich cultural heritage, and find sustainable solutions. Traditional practices are often rooted in local wisdom and sustainable practices that respect and protect cultural heritage.

The Bali model

Given the growing influence of Asian countries globally, we have an opportunity to set an example of how best to safeguard cultural heritage and develop innovative solutions that consider cultural practices and preserve our connection with nature. In developing climate actions, we must keep an open mind and understand other cultures worldwide, specifically the different practices related to nature conservation.

Let us take Balinese Hinduism as an example. Under Balinese Hindu philosophy, people are God's creation (Brahman), with the Atman in humans being the spark of God's holy light, giving life to humans. This belief leads to a sense of gratitude and devotion, with individuals considering themselves indebted to God. Thus, they worship, follow religious teachings, and participate in gatherings at holy places. This relationship is essential for a serene life and is manifested in individuals' sense of togetherness with the rest of God's creations. There is a strong emphasis on mutual support, guided by concepts like mutual honing, mutual compassion, nurturing, respect, and love. This harmonious relationship creates security and inner and outer peace in society on a higher level.

The Balinese people believe in a give-and-take relationship with nature. Since nature provides for them, they feel responsible for preserving nature in return. This is the basis for their sustainable environmental practices. Daily actions are influenced by this give-and-take principle, such as watering plants, managing garbage, or even the "Subak" system of rice production, which motivates the community to protect the forests and conserve water. With people's basic needs and livelihood dependent on the environment, they are committed to caring for it and keeping it from being damaged. They avoid polluting it, refrain from cutting down forests arbitrarily, and avoid overhunting animals, understanding that such activities can disturb the delicate balance of nature. Properly maintaining the environment is seen as a way to create beauty and bring a sense of calm and serenity to human life.

In essence, the Balinese philosophy emphasises the importance of a positive relationship between culture and nature to maintain balance and harmony.

The role of local communities

In this context, we believe in the crucial roles of local and indigenous communities in making decisions and implementing climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. These communities offer valuable local wisdom that we can collectively learn from in terms of preserving our natural environment. Our focus should not be on what belongs to whom, who is the most entitled, or who should benefit, but on unity and shared responsibility.

Climate change or the long-term shift in temperature and weather patterns, affects people in diverse ways. Some of us are already more vulnerable, facing challenges related to health, food, housing, safety, and work (United Nations, 2020). Our conditions have worsened, and entire communities must now make an effort to tackle the impacts of climate change. As we take steps to do so, there is an opportunity to revisit our own cultural heritage and traditional practices so they can be harnessed in designing climate action policies.

The movement to reinvent local traditions and facilitate the participation and empowerment of local and indigenous communities in Southeast Asia is led by the Southeast Asian Culture Heritage Alliance or SEACHA. The network includes conservation organisations and individuals from various countries: Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Viet Nam, the Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Myanmar. SEACHA carries out activities to promote cultural heritage as an integral part of climate action. For example, it held a conference titled "Cultural Wisdom for Climate Action: The Southeast Asian Contribution" in Bangkok on 12-14 January 2023, which involved youth from 10 Member States of ASEAN. SEACHA invited young people because it believes in cultivating young talents with global insights, compassion for global issues and vulnerable groups like indigenous peoples, and the ability to explore and develop innovations for local and global challenges. To identify solutions and cultivate global citizens, we must inspire the youth to open their minds and understand global cultures and practices from around the world.

Culture and climate action

SEACHA members, along with other countries in Asia, believe that integrating local traditional practices into the current dynamic framework of modern climate action policies is not difficult. Localised climate action requires the commitment and broad participation of community members to comprehend the philosophical background behind these traditions (Smith and Akagawa, 2009). Examining traditional practices in Asia illustrates how harmony is embedded in local wisdom. Conservation is an inherent part of some traditional practices, requiring consideration of social issues.

Local people harbour a strong attachment to their ancestors' legacy, fueling their passion for nurturing local traditions (Lowenthal, 2009). The threats to nature serve as a valuable lesson, prompting people to maintain their environment, from small and simple actions to bigger initiatives involving broad participation. Still, limitations in capabilities sometimes hinder individuals from fully implementing climate action in their daily lives. Urgent collaboration and coordination among different stakeholders and sectors, such as culture, environment, development, education, science, and tourism, are needed to address the complex and interrelated issues of climate change and cultural heritage. Given these challenges, we need a network among countries to share ideas for mutual learning and strengthening best practices.

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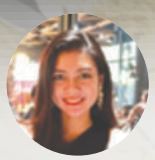
Threading a Path towards Sustainable Fashion in ASEAN



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How many clothes do we throw away each year? Or have you ever thought about where all our clothes end up after we are done with them?

In recent decades, the fashion industry has been changing at a rapid pace globally. The fast fashion boom in the late 1980s (Thomas, 2019) shifted the industry from a slow-paced production-driven one to a fast-paced market-driven supply chain (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). While it democratised fashion, making then-elite clothing more inclusive and accessible (Bau, 2017), it accelerated production cycles, resulting in the overconsumption of unstainable clothing. Today, we live in an era of instant gratification, where the demand for disposable, single-use, and non-durable items has increased tremendously. The combination of all these factors has given rise to the "throwaway culture," where people think and act like everything is temporary, disposable, and easily replaced.

The throwaway fashion culture has worsened over time. People tend to buy the most affordable clothing and discard an item after wearing it for only seven or eight times (Remy et al., 2016). The result has been an estimated 92 million tons of fashion waste ending up in landfills annually (Fashion Revolution, 2019). The laundering of synthetic textiles also recorded the highest portions (34.8 per cent) of microplastics released into the ocean, more than tyre abrasion from driving and city dust (Boucher & Friot, 2017). The fashion industry accounts for between 2 and 8 per cent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (UNEP, 2023), outweighing the carbon footprint from international flights and shopping (Chinasamy, 2019).

In Southeast Asia, the fashion industry has become more vibrant. The emerging middle classes, combined with a predominantly tech-savvy youth demographic, are projected to drive the growth of six core markets—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam—to over 50 billion US dollars (Kim, Potia, & Wintels, 2020). While the region's growth might potentially worsen the current state of the fashion industry's waste, Southeast Asia has demonstrated a prospective future towards sustainable fashion (Fashion Revolution Singapore & ODC, 2021). The Global Survey of Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability by Nielsen indicates that ASEAN citizens are willing to spend more to acquire sustainable products; 80 per cent of consumers in the region show a preference for buying products from companies that have been working actively to reduce their adverse social and environmental effects (Nielsen Press Room, 2015).

Collective consciousness

The throwaway culture contributes significantly to the triple planetary crises that we face today, which include pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss. The key to eliminating the throwaway fashion culture is to have a collective consciousness centered around sustainability. This entails a paradigm shift for both producers and consumers, encouraging them to prioritise values related to ecological sustainability, ethics, and fair labour practices throughout the entire fashion supply chain. This shift emphasises considerations beyond mere functionality (wearability) or to conform to social expectations.

Ethical fashion consumption

Addressing the issues of excessive consumption and wastage requires changing consumer behaviour. It is essential to raise public awareness on the importance of inclusive and sustainable fashion through the 4R method—Reuse, Reduce, Repair, and Recycle. The aim is to educate individuals about sustainability and their roles in achieving it.

Reuse: It means wearing used or secondhand clothes, passed down through generations and multiple

Photo Credit: ©Fiori Rizki Djuwita

owners. Several organisations carry out the reuse movement. Today, several communities are actively facilitating the exchange-of-clothes movements, such as Zero Waste Indonesia, Fashion Pulpit Singapore, and The Swap Project Malaysia.

Reuse is sometimes conflated with the term "thrifting" which refers to buying quality secondhand or vintage clothing to raise funds for charity or a cause. However, thrifting has now come to mean buying smuggled or illegally sourced secondhand clothes and should therefore be discouraged.

Reduce: It entails a conscious effort to select clothes and minimise the number of purchases, such as buying timeless and basic designs that can be worn and used longer. It is to buy more locally-produced products to help decrease the carbon footprint from transporting and goods.

Repair: It means mending items to extend their use or function. Roving tailors and shoe repairers, still common among many Southeast Asian countries, reflect a preference for fixing items instead of spending on new ones.

Recycle: It falls under two categories: downcycling and upcycling. Downcycling entails mechanically or manually breaking down clothes and turning them back into fibres. In this process, the fibres are usually spun again into a new fabric. Upcycling is a process of adding more value to used goods. Upcycling is closely related to modifying clothes and breathing new life into old fabrics. Upcycling trends are growing in the ASEAN market with the emergence of eco-conscious fashion businesses that aim to minimise fashion waste. Etah Studio Brunei Darussalam, Setali Indonesia, Tembine Thailand, and RIOtaso Clothing Philippines are some companies that are in the business of upcycling.

Production: Ethically made fashion

Raising awareness about the importance of sustainability in the production can be challenging but not impossible. Although it is hard to eliminate the use of chemicals in processing textiles, it is still feasible to reduce it in some essential operations, namely: (i) merging the three processing steps of desizing (removing starch from fabric), scouring (removing dirt from fabric), and bleaching (removing natural pigment) into one, (ii) applying clean production techniques, (iii) reducing the number of ingredients in processing, (iv) using the least harmful chemicals, (v) being energy efficient and water conscious, and (vi) decreasing waste production and establishing waste management stream (Pratiwie, 2023). Another crucial aspect of being ethical is to pay great attention to workplace ecosystems, including ensuring workers' safety and welfare. In addition, fashion industries are encouraged to follow the sustainability guidelines outlined in ISO 14000 or some other relevant ISO standards for sustainability (Rajkishore et al, 2019).

In the ASEAN region, there is a heightened interest among businesses to produce sustainable fashion, such as the Hnin WittHmone Natural Dyed Cotton & Silk Weaving Center Myanmar and TaiBaan Lao PDR. Both businesses focus on empowering people ethically by providing them with training, fair wages, and safe working conditions. Furthermore, they source their materials locally and use natural dye for their products (Worldbank, 2019; Mulberries.org, 2019).

ASEAN's national governments have also made notable progress in promoting sustainable fashion. For example, Better Factories Cambodia seeks to ensure a transparent cycle of production by closely monitoring and reporting the working conditions in Cambodian textile factories (Fashion Revolution & ODC, 2021). Viet Nam's National Green Growth Strategy promotes green consumption and sustainable lifestyles in daily lives, such as through eco-labelling and industry transparency, among others (Thong, N.T, et al., 2017).

Towards sustainable fashion in ASEAN

ASEAN holds great potential for achieving sustainable fashion. It is shown by the growing interest and efforts taken by ASEAN's governments businesses, and increased citizens' awareness to uphold sustainable principles in fashion industries.

ASEAN is promoting the green and circular economy through various initiatives as follows: (i) including the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) led by the ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment, signifying the potential of the green and circular economy to accelerate post-pandemic recovery, and (ii) the Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community, guiding ASEAN in achieving sustainable consumption and production, as well as accelerating ASEAN's transition to a circular economy.

Under the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting for Culture and Arts, various projects have been implemented to preserve and safeguard eco-fashion techniques, such as ASEAN Green Cultural Entrepreneur, Natural Dyes of ASEAN: Promoting Natural Dyes for Traditional and Contemporary Craft Textiles, highlighting the use of natural dyes, eco-printing, and hand weaving from locally sourced resources, while also empowering the growth of the local communities. Another upcoming project is the Saa Paper Workshop to Promote Plastic-Free in ASEAN.

Achieving a sustainable fashion in ASEAN cannot be done overnight; it needs a strong commitment and total involvement from all relevant stakeholders, including policy-makers, private sectors and citizens, to jointly create supportive and enabling ecosystems for both the supply and demand sides to shift the current linear economic model into a circular textile value chain.

To wrap up, throwing out the throwaway fashion culture is beyond just buying "sustainable" labelled fashion items, secondhand clothes, or expensive brands to be exclusive. It is having a better understanding of our clothes' lifecycle—from where they are sourced up to how they will be discarded—so that we can make responsible and mindful choices. By shifting towards the 4R mindset, we are not only contributing to sustainable and circular fashion, we are also investing in our future.

References may be accessed through this link: https://bit.ly/Issue32_Ref

Starting from the bottom left and moving clockwise: Isyana Sarasvati; Seol Hoseung from SURL; So Yoon from Se So Neon; Iga Massardi and Puti Chitara from Barasuara; Widy Hamzah and Hanis Hamdan from Gerhana Skacinta; Asteriska from Barasuara

2023 Round Festival

'STEP OUT, SING AS ONE'

From Online to Onstage

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Thousands braved Jakarta's blistering heat to experience the live music performances by talented Southeast Asian and South Korean artists at the 2023 Round Festival on 21-22 October 2023. After holding virtual concerts since the event was launched in 2020 as part of the ASEAN–Republic of Korea (ROK) Music Festival, the artists could finally perform before an enthusiastic crowd.

Embracing the theme "Step Out, Sing as One," the festival started with a captivating line-up of performers.

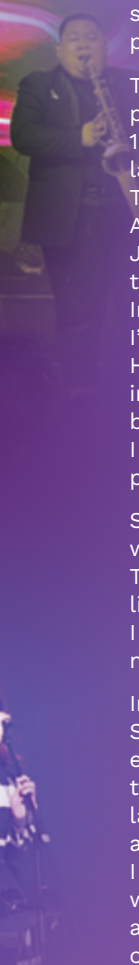
Malaysia's Gerhana Skacinta electrified the stage with their 1950s ska beats. Dila Aisyah and the Boys from Brunei Darussalam enchanted the audience with their versatile sounds. Cambodia's One Peace Band and Myanmar's Velocity X Jewel dazzled the crowd with their energetic acts.

The excitement soared higher when Filipino boy band SB19 took the stage and performed their high-octane hit *Gento*. Korea's Se So Neon and SGO kept the momentum going with their riveting performances.

The night ended on a high note with Indonesian artists Barasuara and Isyana Sarasvati, the latter delivering a stunning duet with So Yoon from Se So Neon.

The excitement continued into the second day, featuring performers from Thailand, the Lao PDR, Viet Nam, Singapore, ROK, and Indonesia.

Photo Credit: *©2023 Round Festival*



ASIA7 from Thailand fired up the crowd with an exciting fusion of traditional instruments and modern music. This was followed by dynamic and heart-pounding performances from Black Eyes of the Lao PDR and Pháo from Viet Nam.

The audience next enjoyed the soothing music of brb. from Singapore, Indonesian artists Pamungkas and Ardhito Pramono. Korea's Galaxy Express, Jimmy Brown, and SURL also graced the stage and delivered unforgettable performances.

The two-day festival drew 8,000 people on the first day, ballooning to 15,000 by the festival's close. It left a lasting impression on the attendees. Twenty-six-year-old Fatima Nur Alifa, a festival attendee from Jakarta, noted: "I found out about this event through social media. Initially, I came just to see SB19, as I've been a fan since their early days. However, the festival piqued my interest in the other performers. I've been here since the start today, and I think I've enjoyed every country's performance."

She added: "When I found out it was free, I decided to give it a try. The experience was intense, almost like a ticket war, but it was worth it. I couldn't sleep afterwards, but the memories made it all worthwhile."

In his remarks, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, eloquently captured the essence of the event: "As music is a universal language that breaks boundaries and brings people closer together, I am positive that ROUND 2023 will resonate with our peoples far and wide, and strengthen the spirit of camaraderie of the peoples of ASEAN and Korea."

Similarly, Ambassador of the ROK to ASEAN, Lee Jang-keun, emphasised the broader implications of such cultural exchanges: "It is very important for future generations to be at the centre of friendship and partnership between ASEAN and Korea, and I hope that the ROUND 2023 will become a venue for young people to interact with each other and build friendship through music."

Striking a universal chord: Artists reflect on musical connection

The participating artists were excited to be part of the festival. Iga Massardi, vocalist and guitarist from Barasuara of Indonesia, stressed the importance of music as a universal language.

> We often think that not understanding each other's languages prevents us from working together with people from other nations. However, it turns out that through melodies and explorations in musical arrangements, we can break down these walls, creating a universal language.

He told *The ASEAN*: "An interesting point to highlight here is that the primary challenge has always been the language barrier. We often think that not understanding each other's languages prevents us from working together with people from other nations. However, it turns out that through melodies and explorations in musical arrangements, we can break down these walls, creating a universal language. We can share across various genres and from different countries and nations. Music, in its pure form, is what we have in common. It binds us together."

Puti Chitara, also from Barasuara, highlighted the event's potential for cultural exchange and underscored the necessity of increased international collaboration opportunities. She also pointed out the significance of learning from South Korea's example in presenting popular culture on a global stage.

"South Korea has been laying the groundwork for initiatives like this for an extensive period, given its status as a government-backed programme integral to the Korean wave. Recognising the vital role of music and culture as significant and easily shareable products, similar initiatives are crucial for our country," Puti noted. "There is a pressing need for substantial support from the government and various sectors to generate more opportunities, especially in Indonesia, where we have a wealth of musical talent possibly amounting to millions. With the right opportunities, there's no limit to what we can achieve," she added.

Vocalist and guitarist Seol Hoseung from SURL, meanwhile, expressed his delight, noting the unique chance to connect with Korean musicians and fans, as well as artists and attendees from across Southeast Asia. "I am absolutely delighted because we got the chance not only to meet with South Korean singers and audiences but also to interact with various artists and attendees from different countries, especially from Southeast Asia," he said.

"After listening to both Korean and Southeast Asian music, what we feel is that music is universally enjoyable. If the singer is good, it's good. If the song is good, it's good. So what I've learned is that music is indeed universal." drummer Oh Myeongsuk added.

The festival was hosted by the Korean Broadcasting System (KBS) and supported by the government of the ROK through the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation Fund. It was preceded by a two-day music forum from August 3-4 that gathered ASEAN and ROK industry professionals to network and exchange ideas. The festival is expected to continue showcasing the diversity of Asian music and its power to unify by breaking through language and cultural barriers.

SB19 was one of the most-anticipated acts at the 2023 Round Festival in Jakarta (21/10/2023)

Artist Profile

SB19: Setting the Gold Standard for P-Pop

Introducing SB19: the Filipino boy band sensation featuring John Paulo Nase (Pablo), Josh Cullen Santos (Josh), Stellvester Ajero (Stell), Felip Jhon Suson (Ken), and Justin De Dios (Justin). Established in 2018, this group has garnered attention for their dynamic live performances, vocal prowess, and versatility, releasing original tracks that span various musical genres.

Last May, SB19 dropped six tracks in their latest EP, *PAGTATAG*, translating to establishment or founding in Filipino.

Gento, the lead track from the EP, is a certified hit, confirming SB19's expanding international appeal. SB19 offers a distinctive and compelling musical style to the local music industry. Now, the group is making waves as it brings Pinoy or P-pop to the global stage.

The group's main songwriter, Pablo, explained, "'Gento' directly translates to 'gold' [ginto]. In the South, it means 'like this' [gan'to]. Essentially, the song is about all the hardships we've endured and the perseverance that has made us golden."

"If I were to recommend three songs, I'd start with *Gento*. It's a track that resonates with a wide audience. Next up is *Crimzone*, an energetic anthem that's perfect for amping up your workout or boosting your mood. And the third is *Mapa*, one of our biggest hits. It's a tribute to our guiding forces, our parents, hence the title 'Mama and Papa.' I encourage you all to give it a listen," he added.

The release was followed by a second successful North American tour and a 5th fan meet in Manila. A rousing performance and two awards at the recently-held Asia Artists Awards 2023 have solidified SB19's growing international appeal.

The group is one of the most-awaited acts at the 2023 Round Festival in Jakarta last October. SB19 fan, 22-year-old Ayu Wija, travelled over 1,000 kilometres on a motorbike from Bali to Jakarta to watch her idols perform. The trip took five days. "Their incredible talent is a spirit lifter, pushing negativity away. I see them on par with South Korean idols, given their massive fanbase," she told *The ASEAN*.

"It is my first time meeting them. On the 19th (October), we joined fan club admins at the airport to welcome them. Our group was diverse, with members from Singapore and the Philippines," Wija added, proof of the group's fanbase geographic spread.

"The group came to my radar in June through TikTok. I fell for their complete package—the visuals, the rap, their undeniable coolness," added another concert-goer Yue Karyadi, enthusiastically.

Just before SB19's performance at the Round 2023 Festival, Stell told *The ASEAN,* "First and foremost, we want to urge everyone to ride safely. We often hear stories of fans going to great lengths to see us, travelling from distant places. It's overwhelming, and we're incredibly grateful. We would love to give each of them a personal hug as a thank you. We are very happy to have them."

Pablo added, "We are profoundly thankful for everyone who supports us, especially those who travel great distances just to watch us perform. If I could see her right now, if I could talk to her, I would say, 'Thank you so much, we love all of you dearly.'"

Addressing what distinguishes Southeast Asian music from global genres, Pablo highlighted the area's rich web of cultures and experiences. "Take Indonesia, for example, with its extensive archipelago of over 10,000 islands. This geographical diversity translates into a rich cultural heritage, offering us, as Southeast Asian artists, a unique set of experiences and stories to share on the global stage. It's an incredible opportunity to showcase how these varied communities unite and engage with one another," he concluded.

As the group was preparing to go on stage, Stell delved into the brilliant idea behind Round Festival, highlighting the significance of such events in bridging cultures and celebrating diversity in music.

"Events like Round Festival are such a great way to celebrate each country, everyone's culture, and every music artist in the world. Because this event connects every artist, the language barrier is nothing if the music really connects to the people. All artists have the same goal to connect with everyone."

Photo Credit: ©*Ayu Wija, 2023 Round Festival*

SB19's fans had a group photo at 2023 Round Festival installation

Clarence Liew (left) and Marc Lian (right) from brb.

Artist Profile

brb.: Bringing R&B Back to the Heart of Singapore

brb., a Singaporean R&B trio, masterfully weaves together the nostalgic echoes of the 80s and 90s with the sounds of today's music scene. The group consists of Clarence Liew (CLO), Auzaie Zie (Zie), and Marc Lian (Marc). Each artist infuses brb. with their unique musical heritage from previous bands—CLO, Disco Hue, and TRICK. Their 2018 debut with the single "Cool With It" marked a significant milestone, setting the tone for their unique musical journey.

Originating as a passion project in a home studio in central Singapore, brb.'s foundation was built on a shared love for R&B, hip hop, and soul. This fusion of genres and influences from diverse backgrounds has contributed to their distinctive sound and style. Their music has resonated with audiences across Asia, thanks to their groovy hits and their 2020 album "relationsh*t," which showcases their exceptional talent and the natural chemistry among the members.

During a pre-performance interview with *The ASEAN* at the Round Festival 2023, brb., despite Zie's absence, gladly shared their insightful reflections and future aspirations.

CLO said he envisions a future with more intimate stage setups to enhance the connection between the artists and their audience. "I think for the next time, maybe we can have more stages, ones with more intimate setups. There, the audience and the performer can have a more personal interaction, which would be nice," he reflected. Marc supported CLO's idea, noting that "having more stages with diverse acts will attract a broader range of musicians and audiences."

Marc delved into the uniqueness of Southeast Asian music, attributing its distinctiveness to the region's rich cultural diversity, which significantly influences their music. "What sets Southeast Asian music apart is the sheer amount of culture. The music is a reflection of that. Talking about our culture, our food, it all affects our music," he explained.

Marc also emphasised the significance of events like the Round Festival for the Southeast Asian music industry and musicians. "This event plays a huge role in the Southeast Asian music industry. Opportunities like this for Southeast Asian musicians are rare. We don't often get the chance to see performers from countries I have never visited before, which is pretty amazing," he said.

Concluding our conversation, brb. extended an invitation to Southeast Asian music enthusiasts. "Give us a shot because our music is spicier!" they encouraged, inviting listeners to embrace the distinct flavours of their sound.

Photo Credit: *©2023 Round Festival*

Pháo gained notable recognition with the release of her song 2 Phút Hơn [More than 2 Minutes] in 2020

Photo Credit: ©2023 Round Festival

Artist Profile

Pháo: From Social Media Sensation to Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Twenty-year-old Nguyễn Diệu Huyền is a Vietnamese rapper and producer. Growing up in Tuyên Quang and later moving to Hanoi, she chose the stage name Pháo (also known as Pháo Northside), symbolising passion. Her love for rap grew when she was 15. Meanwhile, her music career began while she was a Hanoi College of Art student.

She gained notable recognition with the release of her song *2 Phút Hơn* [More than 2 Minutes] in 2020. This song became particularly famous internationally after a remix by DJ/producer KAIZ and later with American rapper Tyga. The remix went viral on social media platforms like TikTok, helping to catapult Pháo to global fame.

Her work stands out for her unique voice and catchy rhythms that blend traditional Vietnamese elements with modern hip-hop and rap. This exciting mix marks her as an influential figure in the evolving landscape of Vietnamese music.

In an interview with *The ASEAN* after her performance at the 2023 Round, Pháo shared her aspirations for Southeast Asian music. She expressed gratitude for the acceptance and support she's received, enabling her to contribute to cultural exchanges within the region and beyond. As a proud representative of her country, she believes in the power of music to foster cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

"I see myself as a small part of a larger movement promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration," she conveyed.

Pháo hopes to expand Vietnamese music globally, recognising that while Western music dominates, there is a growing interest in Southeast Asian sounds.

"My hope is for our music, culture, and artistic vision to reach and resonate with audiences worldwide. This exposure will not only showcase our unique cultural heritage and foster collaboration and deepen connections in work, love, and human relationships," she shared.

Reflecting on her recent performance in the 2023 Round Festival, Pháo described a mix of exhilaration and nervousness.

"Although I was quite anxious, I reminded myself to hide it from the audience. The thought of them realising my nervousness was daunting. Nevertheless, I focused on overcoming my fears and delivering my best performance."

Pháo's music is about more than entertainment; it's about creating a bond with her audience and sharing their emotions, whether joyful or somber. "My goal is to be in harmony with the audience. It's about sharing experiences—being there for them in moments of joy and comfort in times of sadness," she concluded.

ASIA7 is dedicated to bridging the gap between traditional music and a vast global audience, using their unique melodies

Artist Profile

ASIA7: Blending Tradition with Innovation

ASIA7, established at Mahidol University in 2013, is a Thai Asian Pop band renowned for integrating traditional Thai folk instruments with contemporary sounds.

The band features Amornphat Sermsap (Aoy) as lead vocalist; Tontrakul Kaewyong (Ton) on the Pin (an Isan lute) and Khaen (an Isan bamboo mouth organ); Narisara Sakpunjachot (Yoye) playing the Saw Duang (a Thai fiddle) and Saw U; Phoowich Tawasinchanadech (Dew) as bassist; Thitirat Dilokhattakarn (Note) on drums; Kritamet Kittiboonyatiwakron (Oam) as saxophonist; Preeda Kesdee (Boom) on keys; and Suntorn Duangdang (Suntorn) as the guitarist.

During a 2023 Round Festival interview with *The ASEAN*, Ton shared the band's philosophy and journey. This festival, especially post-COVID, represented a significant new chapter for them.

"This is our first time here, and we're grateful for the invitation. We had the chance to experience diverse musical styles from artists across Southeast Asia and South Korea," he said.

Emphasising their commitment to modernising traditional music, he highlighted ASIA7's inclusion of diverse Asian elements, from Thai folk to influences from Japan, India, and China.

"We studied traditional music; we tried how to make the traditional music more modern," Ton said. This drive to contemporise resonates throughout their music, infusing traditional Thai instruments with a modern twist.

ASIA7 views their focus on traditional instruments within the global music scene as a unique opportunity for innovation and a compelling challenge. With a vision to inspire, the band encourages more musicians to embrace traditional music and instruments boldly and wholeheartedly. "If you want to play folk music, traditional instruments, don't be shy, just do it," he encouraged.

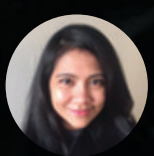
Looking ahead to more international collaborations and festival appearances, ASIA7 aspires to break new ground and gain wider recognition on the global stage.

"We are not a pop band. We have traditional instruments. We cater to a niche market. In the grand scheme of the world, we are quite small. Our challenge is to break down the wall between musicians and the audience. For now, we are trying to do that. We haven't broken the wall yet, but we are climbing it," said Ton, wrapping up our conversation.

Photo Credit: *©2023 Round Festival*

Banjong Pisanthanakun

TURNING NIGHTMARES INTO CINEMATIC MASTERPIECES



Ixora Tri Devi
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Banjong Pisanthanakun, the acclaimed 44-year-old Thai filmmaker, turns Southeast Asian nightmares into worldwide movie masterpieces. He has a deep understanding of the allure of horror tales in the region, explaining that these beliefs are ingrained in us. "They've been a part of our culture since day one. The fascination endures because people genuinely believe in these supernatural phenomena," the filmmaker tells *The ASEAN*.

Ironically, for such a compelling horror storyteller, Banjong is sceptical of the supernatural and mystical beings that pervade Southeast Asian folklore. This scepticism sets a high bar for his films; they must first convince him before they can convince the audience.

"We need to ensure our work is not only authentic but also believable. Every detail in my films must be convincing. Personally, I don't hold these (supernatural) beliefs, so the details must first convince me. Take *The Medium*, for example; I wasn't a firm believer in Shamanism, so I painstakingly worked to make all the ceremonies in the film convincing," he shared.

From old photographs to blockbuster hits

Banjong's journey as a blockbuster horror movie director commenced with *Shutter* in 2004 after he just turned 25. The idea for *Shutter* was intriguing; Banjong and his co-director, Parkpoom Wongpoom, stumbled upon an old photograph while researching a different script project.

"This particular photo evoked memories of the popular 'Spirit Photos' trend from the past." During that time, chain emails were prevalent, and many,

Photo Credit: *©GDH 559 Co., Ltd.*

including Banjong, received numerous messages containing eerie ghost photos and their accompanying stories. "We realised this phenomenon could be the foundation for a compelling horror film."

Banjong and Parkpoom didn't stop there. They ingeniously fused the chain email phenomenon with various Asian urban legends, specifically those centred around spirits resting on someone's neck.

"By combining these elements, we crafted the storyline for *Shutter*, blending the nostalgia of old photographs with the chilling essence of age-old supernatural folklore," he explained.

The response from horror enthusiasts was overwhelming. Hollywood, too, recognised the potential and produced a remake just four years after the original debut.

The ghosts we fear, the ghosts we jeer

When asked about the movie that brought him the most joy, Banjong unhesitatingly mentioned his two comedy-horror films. His first foray into horror comedy was with a short story in *Phobia*, an anthology of horrors, titled *The Man In The Middle*.

"It marked my initial venture into horror comedy, a genre I hadn't explored before. I relished the challenge of inventing novel dialogues and creating a unique blend of horror and humour. This experience allowed me to delve into uncharted territory and experiment with the art of storytelling in a refreshing way."

Five years after *Phobia*, Banjong returned to the horror-comedy genre with *Pee Mak*, released in 2013. Banjong struck gold with *Pee Mak*, which remains the highest-grossing Thai movie, earning over 1 billion baht (about 33 million US dollars at current rates) worldwide, primarily in Asia.

"*Pee Mak* brought me immense joy. It stands as a delightful and witty reinterpretation of Thailand's most renowned urban legend. As I crafted the script, I was determined that it had to be bold and uncompromising, offering a fresh perspective on this urban tale, intricately woven with a beautiful love story."

According to local media reports, during its release, *Pee Mak* experienced overwhelming demand, surpassing even Hollywood blockbusters. The movie, based on local folklore about a young woman named Nak who waits for her husband, Mak, by Phra Khanong canal in Bangkok, resonated deeply with audiences due to its humour and satirical scenes.

The Medium: A global collaboration

Set against the backdrop of a rural Thai village steeped in shamanistic traditions, *The Medium* unfolds the story of Nim, a devoted local shaman, and her niece, Mink, who seems destined to inherit the spiritual mantle. As Mink starts displaying erratic and increasingly violent behaviour, a cloud of uncertainty forms, raising critical questions: Is she channelling a divine entity, or is she under the influence of something far darker and more sinister?

The Medium skillfully intertwines elements of suspense, psychological drama, and supernatural horror, compelling the characters and the audience to navigate the murky waters between age-old traditions, deeply held beliefs, and the unseen realms.

"*The Medium* is my most challenging film. I want the audience to explore their own beliefs after watching the film," said the director.

Banjong revealed that the original story of *The Medium* was traced back to his South Korean producer, Na Hong Jin. "*The Medium* was initially conceived as a South Korean film; he envisioned it transcending languages and backgrounds."

However, when the producer approached Banjong to direct, he discovered a unique aspect within the script.

"This horror story didn't rely on the presence of traditional ghosts; instead, it focused on the transformation of an ordinary girl into a truly terrifying, possessed entity. This concept fascinated me, and I believed it was something truly innovative."

"Driven by this inspiration, I delved into extensive research. I travelled across the country, engaging with genuine shamans, immersing myself in their world. The authenticity I encountered was undeniable. It struck a chord, compelling me to bring this raw and genuine essence to a global audience."

Although Banjong is flattered that numerous viewers regard *The Medium* and *Shutter* as some of the most terrifying films they've ever experienced, his aspiration extends beyond just earning admiration for his work.

"I'm glad to hear that, but what pleases me the most is seeing people discussing and debating about the film. Whether they liked it or not, sparking debates is a testament to the film's impact. To me, the best feedback I received was, 'The most debated film of the year.'"

In closing, Banjong advises aspiring ASEAN filmmakers, particularly those venturing into the horror genre to "explore new stories, backgrounds, ambience, and storytelling methods. People grow tired easily, so a horror film with fresh elements is always exhilarating."

Photo Credit: ©*Showbox and Northern Cross Co., Ltd.*

Riri Riza

FILMS THAT CAPTURE LIFE'S RHYTHMS

Ixora Tri Devi
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"How do you create a movie that defines a generation?" This was the first question posed by *The ASEAN* in an interview with renowned Indonesian filmmaker Riri Riza, 53. It is a fitting question for Riri, whose film, *Petualangan Sherina* [Sherina's Adventure], profoundly resonated with young audiences, resurrecting the appetite for Indonesian cinema in the early 2000s. To millions of Indonesian millennials, this film symbolises their first cinematic experience and remains a nostalgic emblem of their youth.

Two decades later, Riri Riza has released the film's long-awaited sequel, *Petualangan Sherina 2*. "I don't think it should start with a movie," he shared with *The ASEAN*. "To create a film that stands the test of time, that becomes a part of the citizens' identity and defines a generation, we must first believe in what we are doing."

"Not just films, but also other art forms like music, visual arts, and performing arts. All of these elements, if we observe, are connected to societal issues. The creators weren't detached in ivory towers, merely watching from a distance. They truly felt what was happening, the pulse of life beneath the surface."

Reflecting on the state of Indonesian cinema in the mid-90s, Riri noted that the industry was dynamic, capable of producing about 100 films a year.

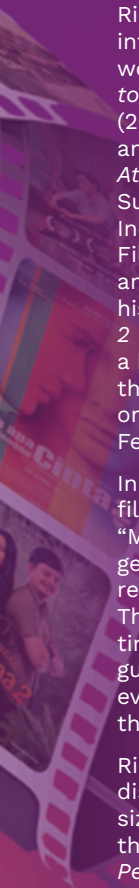
"Before *Petualangan Sherina*, the industry was there, but it was plagued by films that exploited women. This reality spurred us to think, 'This cannot be the sum of Indonesian cinema.'"

During this time, Riri and his contemporaries, in their mid-20s to early 30s, felt a lack of representation in film.

"We needed representation that reflected us: the young, the literate, the film history buffs. We admired legends like Usmar Ismail, Teguh Karya, and Sjumandjaja, but they were no longer active. This gap inspired us to initiate change and usher in a new generation of filmmakers."

This initiative became part of the late 90s' revolutionary movement, coinciding with a transformative period in politics and culture in Indonesia. "Our goal was to nurture an independent, flourishing film industry that benefits all—from the audience to the creators," Riri concluded, outlining the vision behind this cinematic resurgence.

A filmography of truth-telling



Riri Riza has garnered over 15 international awards for his notable works, including *Gie* (2005), *3 Days to Forever* (2007), *Laskar Pelangi* (2008), *Atambua 39° Celsius* (2012), and *Sokola Rimba* (2013). His film *Athirah* (2016), set in his native South Sulawesi, received six Festival Film Indonesia Citra Awards (Indonesian Film Festival), achieving Best Film and Best Director. That same year, his movie *Ada Apa dengan Cinta 2* [*What's Up With Love 2*] became a box office sensation. It was also the opening film at the 2016 Focus on Asia–Fukuoka International Film Festival.

In discussing his approach to filmmaking, Riri candidly revealed, "My goal was never to define a generation but to tell stories that resonate with truth and authenticity." This philosophy, shared with long-time collaborator Mira Lesmana, guided them in creating films that evolved naturally and are unbound by the pursuit of fame or grandeur.

Riri's projects stand out for their distinctiveness, eschewing a one-size-fits-all "Riri Riza style." Post the commercial triumphs of *Laskar Pelangi* and *Sang Pemimpi*, for example, he ventured into niche market films like *Atambua 39° Celsius*. He proudly stated, "Each of my films is like nurturing a unique child with its own story and path."

He believes a film should be a canvas for one's values, life perspectives, passions, and vulnerabilities.

"It is never about being pretentious. It's about working it out and finding the right people. You need an actor who is not only skilled but also believes in these values. You need a cinematographer, sound recordist, and music director, all of whom share this belief. With that, you can make impactful movies. Otherwise, it's going to be very challenging."

From local stories to regional collaboration

Riri's Makassar roots have significantly shaped his filmmaking approach. "Coming from a place that's not the cultural epicentre like Jakarta has its advantages. It fuels my desire to explore and understand different perspectives," he says.

Riri's extensive travels have deepened his appreciation for Indonesia's diverse cultures, a theme evident in his films. "I've made films in Sumba, Flores, and other regions, striving to connect with and positively impact these communities."

By founding Rumata' [*Our Home*] an art space in Makassar in 2011, Riri has created a hub for nurturing emerging cinematic talent, especially from Eastern Indonesia. "Rumata' is more than an art space; it's a cradle for new cinematic expressions," Riri explains.

He points to the evolution of Makassar's film scene since 2015, where filmmakers prioritise local relevance over broader market trends. "Filmmakers here are creating for their community, not necessarily mimicking broader Indonesian market trends," he explains, citing *Mappacci* and *Ambo Nai Supir Andalan* [*Mr. Nai the Reliable Driver*] by Andi Burhamzah as prime examples of this local storytelling approach.

As a successful filmmaker, Riri feels a sense of duty to support and elevate these local voices. "I'm fortunate to have had box office success, to own a house and a car, and to live comfortably. With these blessings, I feel the obligation to contribute and make a difference where I can. My dream is to see a day when we have films from places like Palu and Bukittinggi, capturing the unique stories of these regions."

"I also invite Jakarta's filmmakers to visit Rumata', so they can have different perspectives. Film-making isn't just about business and profit. Here, young filmmakers are inspired to tell stories about everyday life, like the plants in their yards."

Rumata's reach extends beyond local boundaries. In October 2012, Rumata' launched the Southeast Asian Screen Academy, a film school dedicated to up-and-coming filmmakers from Eastern Indonesia, with courses led by renowned film experts from Southeast Asia.

"Our goal is to knit a tight ASEAN film community, fostering learning and sharing within our shared cultural landscape. This regional approach offers richer insights than Western influences," Riri notes.

Opportunities for Southeast Asian films

When asked by *The ASEAN* about the type of movies he believes would resonate in Southeast Asia, Riri expressed his faith in family dramas. "I see great potential in films that depict family struggles, resilience, and triumphs, especially in today's context of social media's pervasive influence," he said. "Such narratives are not only relatable but also profoundly relevant in addressing the challenges families face."

Riri emphasised the shared cultural experiences across Southeast Asia, "Our films often mirror life here, where family values and community pride are paramount."

He also discussed the potential benefits of marketing our movies as uniquely Southeast Asian, especially on over-the-top (OTT) or streaming platforms. "OTT platforms represent an expansion of the retail window, offering a new showcase opportunity, which is beneficial," he explained. Reflecting on the recent developments, he added, "Over the past five years, I would say all Indonesian filmmakers have benefitted from the rise of these platforms. It's a significant opportunity, not just in terms of exposure but also for collaborating with filmmakers across the region."

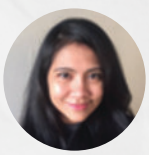
Riri also highlighted the need for more collaborative opportunities within ASEAN. "Culture thrives on openness and accessibility, vital for fostering connections among neighbouring countries," he explained. "We have talented screenplay writers, directors, and producers in ASEAN who can jointly explore new collaboration models."

He urged for more dynamic cultural interaction within Southeast Asia. "Cultural exchange should be a fluid conversation, a sharing of ideas leading to meaningful creations. Often, institutional rigidity stifles these collaborations. We need to break away from such constraints to foster genuine cultural exchange across Southeast Asia," he suggests.

Photo Credit: ©Ixora Tri Devi / *The ASEAN*

TAHILALATS AND MINDBLOWON STUDIO

POP CULTURE IN THE DIGITAL AGE



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Rakhman Azhari (left) and Nurfadli Mursyid (right) in the Mindblowon Universe

Prepare to have your mind blown. That is the mission of Mindblowon Studio, a name derived from the playful Indonesian slang "blo'on," meaning "foolish." Yet, their creativity is anything but foolish.

Mindblowon Studio stands tall as an influential figure in Indonesia's pop culture. Before delving into the story of Mindblowon Studio, let us travel eastward from Jakarta to Sulawesi, an enchanting island with its own tale to tell.

The inked path: Nurfadli's transformation into a digital creator

In 1993, Nurfadli Mursyid, the mastermind behind Tahilalats and Mindblowon Studio, was born in Pare-pare, a little town in South Sulawesi. Like many Indonesian children, young Fadli, affectionately called Palik, spent Sunday mornings entranced by the magic of television. The '90s ushered in an era of anime shows like *Doraemon, Detective Conan, Shin-Chan*, and *Dragon Ball* on Indonesian national TV. Little Palik would sit in front of the TV, pencils and paper in hand, attempting to bring his beloved characters to life. Despite his talent, Palik struggled to find avenues to unleash his creativity.

"Where I grew up, pop culture references were rare. Becoming an illustrator or comic creator was unheard of. I was unaware of the intricate process behind the characters I admired," Palik reminisced.

After honing his skills through various stints with the student press during college in Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi, Palik's passion for illustration found a home at *Fajar*, a renowned local newspaper. "I was overjoyed; it was my first job. From then on, I didn't need to rely on my parents for money," he shared.

This opportunity paved the way for Palik's move to Jakarta in 2015, where he joined a creative team as an illustrator. Within six months of his arrival, Palik received an offer from a South Korean digital comic platform, *Webtoon*, to become one of their in-house content creators.

Webtoon marked a shift in Palik's focus, redirecting him entirely toward nurturing his brainchild, Tahilalats—a webcomic project he had been cultivating diligently alongside his studies and job since 2012. This transition laid the cornerstone of Mindblowon Studio in 2018.

Investing in innovation

"Palik and I weren't born with silver spoons in our mouths," said 31-year-old Rakhman Azhari, also known as Ote, during a conversation with *The ASEAN* at Mindblowon Studio in South Jakarta. "That's why we've worked tirelessly to achieve what we are today," he continued.

In 2018, a turning point in their business journey unfolded when Ote assumed the role of CEO for Tahilalats, catalysing the birth of Mindblowon Studio.

"Tahilalats resonates emotionally with many people. This emotional connection is rare and invaluable, precisely what marketers seek. We never need to ask our audience to like, comment, and share our content. They did it for us already. That includes me! That is why I was eager to join forces with Palik," Ote confessed.

What began as a passion project metamorphosed into the expansive universe of Mindblowon. Embracing collaboration, the studio now boasts a vibrant team of 30 young individuals, including writers, illustrators, storyboard creators, content heads, animators, marketers, social media administrators, and more—a diverse ensemble collectively creating wonders.

"At first, I was nervous. Could others replicate my drawings? Could they spin tales like I do? It took time to accept. Eventually, I realised they could. Working collaboratively, as a team, proved not just easier but immensely productive," Palik remarked.

The studio has collaborated with over 110 brands, spanning diverse sectors such as food and beverages, apparel, footwear, magazines, marathon events, and even international bands like Coldplay. Among these collaborations, the most significant for Ote was with Futabasha, the publishing company behind *Shin-chan,* a manga and anime character loved by many in Indonesia.

"We gained firsthand insights into the intellectual properties (IP) industry. We implemented a comprehensive 360-degree marketing strategy and were invited to Japan to witness the author's work firsthand. For me, it was an incredibly valuable learning experience. Our cross-collaborations became viral, and our unique event at a Jakarta mall was packed with people. They came to relive their nostalgia with Shin-chan. It encapsulated what we aimed to achieve," shared Ote.

"Futabasha was also astonished when they discovered us. They had no idea that an Indonesian IP creator had such a substantial following in Indonesia. This situation underscores a challenge we face. Rarely do we get the opportunity to showcase our IP beyond Indonesia's borders. While we occasionally receive invitations to attend exhibitions, there is undoubtedly much more that the government could do to support our local creatives.

"We recognise that investing in the creative industry doesn't yield immediate profits; it's a long-term commitment that extends beyond 1-2 years. However, it's crucial for the government to place trust in its creative talent. Given the opportunity, we can innovate and expand, ultimately contributing significantly to the nation's growth," Ote noted.

© USUI YOSHITO 1992-2023 Licensed by Animation Int'l
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The quest for a main character

With their growing international recognition, numerous collaboration invitations have poured in. "We have another collaboration with a Japanese IP in the works. I can't divulge the details yet, but we're thrilled!" exclaimed Ote.

To ensure seamless collaboration, Mindblowon Studio is diligently searching for their main character. Palik explained, "Initially when I created Tahilalats, I didn't want a main character as it might limit my stories. Today, for instance, I may want to tell stories about a farmer, tomorrow about a pilot. Having only one main character could pose challenges."

"Yes, however, collaborating with other international IPs would be much more straightforward if we had a main character," Ote chimed in. "We're currently developing one, anticipating more cross-collaborations with global companies. The main character will be part of a broader universe, akin to Disney or Marvel. That's our ultimate goal."

"Our aspiration is to create an evergreen legacy. When I'm old and, perhaps, no longer around, someone else can continue what we're doing now. Our focus is on building this emotional bond with our audience and creating memories. They'll pass down these memories to their children and generations to come," echoed Palik, who is also a father of two.

Leading the way for the next generations

Five years after the initiation of Mindblowon Studio, the company has garnered more than five million followers on Instagram. Reflecting on their "zero to hero" journey, Palik and Ote encourage young individuals not to fear pursuing a career in the creative industry.

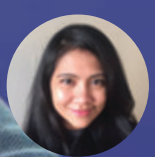
"Consistency is key," shared Palik. "Over a decade ago, when I started, I pushed myself to release something every single day. At 3 p.m., my audience knew they'd find something new. That's how they came to expect it, eagerly awaiting my latest comic each day."

Ten years and over three thousand posts later, millions of fans still eagerly anticipate Tahilalats' daily release. For many, this brief four-panel comic provides a moment of escape, a chance to be blown away.

Photo Credit: ©Mindblowon Studio

Nizam Razak

ANIMATING AND CELEBRATING SOUTHEAST ASIA'S CULTURAL RICHES



Ixora Tri Devi
Staff Writer, The ASEAN
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

In the first episode of the much-loved Malaysian television series, the title character, *BoBoiBoy*, goes on a train journey to his grandfather's house on Rintis Island. Upon arrival, *BoBoiBoy* eagerly gets off the train and mistakenly hugs a stranger, thinking it's his grandfather. In a humorous and delightful twist, his real grandpa, Tok Aba, also ends up in an embrace with the wrong child. The two soon reunite and head home together, ready for many more adventures ahead.

BoBoiBoy is the brainchild of 40-year-old Mohd. Nizam Abdul Razak, or Nizam Razak. He says his childhood in Malacca, Malaysia, was like *BoBoiBoy*'s —filled with the warmth of his grandparents' company.

However, instead of embarking on heroic quests, Nizam's days were filled with collecting Japanese manga and learning graphic design. His dream, though not of superpowers, was equally ambitious—to share the richness of Malaysian heritage with the world.

Nizam shares with *The ASEAN*, "When I was about 14 or 15, my mom got an internet modem. This was when I became hooked on the internet, chatting and playing games. At that time, I was living with my grandmother. She said to me, 'Ijam, instead of wasting your time, why don't you do something beneficial with the internet?' Since I had an interest in visuals, I began learning about graphic design from the internet, which opened opportunities for me to connect with people beyond my circle."

Nizam's journey as an animator and creator began to flourish when studying at Malaysia Multimedia University (MMU), notably with the creation of *Misi Mustahak* [Mustahak's Mission]. This student's project not only achieved significant recognition but also won prestigious awards, including the "Best Works" title at the 10th Malaysia Video Award and a Gold Medal for Short Animated Film. During this period, he met Tuan Haji Burhanuddin, the CEO of Les' Copaque Production. This encounter led to the development of a groundbreaking 3D animation film (*Geng Pengembaraan Bermula, Geng: The Adventure Begins*) and Nizam's substantial involvement in *Upin Ipin* series from 2006 to 2009.

Building on this success, he established Animonsta Studio in 2009. In 2016, the company underwent a rebranding, shortening its name to "Monsta" to reflect its expanded focus beyond animation to include merchandising. The studio's debut animation, *BoBoiBoy*, originated from a desire to create a regional superhero.

"I thought, why not create our own superhero? A child hero, relatable and inspiring to other kids. Thus, *BoBoiBoy* was born, named for his unique ability to split into three. But that was just the start. We're now also developing *Mechamato* and *PapaPipi*. It all began from the dream of a village boy."

Reviving the local intellectual property industry

During his time at MMU in the early 2000s, Nizam noticed most companies were servicing international clients or focusing on advertising. This trend towards 2D work and service projects struck him as a missed opportunity.

"In Malaysia, we're capable of producing high-quality products for others, but it always puzzled me why we weren't using our rich culture for our creative content. Despite doubts and comparisons to giants like Disney and Pixar, I motivated my team to believe in our vision of reaching beyond the Malaysian audience to make an impact across the region."

"I believe that Monsta's stories might inspire studios around the region like in Indonesia, Viet Nam, and Thailand. Although Thai studios were initially more advanced in content creation, I feel that Malaysia has now taken a leading role in this field. Meanwhile, Vietnamese studios are gaining recognition in gaming. With our population and market, collaboration across the region is essential."

Juggling his duties as an adjunct professor at MMU, Nizam remains committed to educating future talents. "My schedule is busy, but I prioritise this important work. In the studio, we face challenges in producing 3D animated feature films and high-quality content, but our experienced team is constantly evolving and mentoring new talent."

His team at Monsta, inclusive of members from various Southeast Asian countries, reflects this commitment to diversity and skill development. "We are always searching for talented screenwriters, directors, and animators. Not only from Malaysia, some of my key staff are Indonesians. Usually, they studied at MMU, and then they worked with us and are part of our team right now. "

Superheroes with a homely touch

One of Monsta's most significant achievements, as Nizam Razak proudly shares, is their successful foray into international markets, particularly Japan. "We've recently started exporting to Japan, and the positive feedback from Japanese viewers has been encouraging—they really love the show for its positivity."

BoBoiBoy, along with his multiracial friends Yaya, Ying, and Gopal, has proven to resonate globally, finding audiences in countries as diverse as Japan, Portugal, and Turkey. Nizam attributes this success to the rich cultural diversity that forms the core of their local products.

"Diversity and harmony are our strengths. If we try to emulate the West, we'll always be a step behind because they know their culture better. They have unique cultural symbols like hamburgers and cowboys that are specific to them. We can't replicate that. Instead, we should focus on our own culture, carefully choosing elements that capture its essence."

Nizam illustrates this approach with *Mechamato*, a character practising the traditional martial art of *silat*, designed to appeal to a global audience without being solely about silat. This strategy of smart storytelling is pivotal in making their content relatable worldwide.

Underpinning Monsta's philosophy is a commitment to younger audiences. Nizam emphasises, "For me, animation is for kids. We focus on children. We also explore deeper subjects from a child's perspective to ensure it benefits them."

He is also appealing to ASEAN leaders, to recognise and invest in the cultural power of content. "Believe in our people and our culture," he implores. "Investing in content that reflects our values is critical, especially since it shapes the minds of future generations —the upcoming leaders, doctors, teachers, and parents."

Nizam's vision for Monsta is to become a powerhouse in the ASEAN region, representing its values through diverse products and content. "Since rebranding in 2016, Monsta has evolved to be more than just an animation company. We now encompass a wider range of creative endeavours, aiming to resonate with audiences across ASEAN and beyond. So, please support us!"

Photo Credit: ©*Monsta*

SNAPSHOTS

Could an age-old grain be a solution to global hunger?

Joanne B. Agbisit
Associate Editor, The ASEAN
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Yes, experts assert that millets offer a sustainable and healthy food source capable of feeding populations worldwide.

Millets constitute a diverse group of small-grained dryland cereals, including varieties such as pearl, proso, foxtail, barnyard, little, kodo, browntop, finger, and guinea millets. Additionally, black and white fonio, sorghum, teff, Job's tears, and numerous other local species fall under the umbrella of millets.

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations designated 2023 as the International Year of Millets to draw attention to the numerous benefits of these grains, ranging from their sustainability and climate resilience to nutrition and health benefits. This designation originated from a proposal from India, which is currently the world's leading producer of millets.

Photo Credit: ©Mabeline72 / Shutterstock

Ambassador Jayant Khobragade led the opening of the ASEAN-India Millet Festival

Participants partake of snacks made from millet

ASEAN and India organised the ASEAN-India Millet Festival on 22-26 November 2023 in Jakarta, Indonesia to mark this momentous year. Both regions recognise the potential of millets to address hunger and food insecurity.

"At the ASEAN-India Summit on 7th of September this year, one of the joint statements we adopted was on food security. Two months hence, we already have this millet festival, which covers food security. That is how effectively our comprehensive strategic partnership is working," remarked the Permanent Representative of India to ASEAN, Ambassador Jayant Khobragade.

A climate-resilient crop and superfood

Expert speakers at the ASEAN-India Millet Festival panel sessions highlighted the exceptional qualities that make millets a climate-resilient crop.

Millets, they note, have a remarkable ability to grow in adverse conditions, from extreme temperatures to arid environments and diverse soil types. Their capacity to grow with minimal water requirements makes them particularly adaptable during periods of water scarcity or drought. Millets exhibit resilience far exceeding major crops like rice or wheat.

Millets are also farmer-friendly since they have a short growing cycle (12-14 weeks) and do not require much input. Dr. Maninder Kaur Dwivedi of India's Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare noted: "For the cultivator, millet is a very low-input crop. It requires hardly any pesticide or any fertiliser. It is resistant to a lot of diseases. So the cost of production itself is down. And one or the other millet variety is available throughout the year. Post-harvest storage of millets is much simpler than the conventional crops which have become our staples. One of the millets which grows in India called Kodu can, for instance, be stored for years if not decades with no nutritional degradation happening."

Since millets require minimal water and agrochemical interventions, they leave very little carbon footprint and promote sustainable farming practices. They even contribute to carbon capture by enhancing soil structure.

Meanwhile, millets have been hailed as a "superfood" because of their excellent nutritional value. "For the consumer, the nutritional benefits are many. It is high in protein, high in minerals, high in fibers. It is gluten-free, and most millets have a low glycemic index," said Dr. Maninder Kaur Dwivedi.

With 800 million people worldwide living in hunger, Rajendra Aryal, UN FAO country director for Indonesia and Timor Leste, said millets can be positioned as a solution to immediate global food challenges. At the same time, millets can be "allies" for building resilient, inclusive, and equitable agri-food systems that can withstand the impacts of climate change and disasters.

India as a global millet producer

India currently accounts for 40 per cent of global millet production, serving as a source of livelihood for more than 25 million farmers.

According to Smt. Shubha Thakur of India's Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, the government of India tapped its ministries, such as Commerce and Industry, Food, and Agriculture, to establish safety standards, assist farmers, increase yield, and export millets around the globe.

The declaration of the 2023 International Year of Millets has given India a venue to advocate for the sustainable cultivation and consumption of millets. Smt. Shubha Thakur said campaigns have been organised by educational institutions within India and by

Photo Credit: *©Indian Mission to ASEAN*

Indian embassies worldwide to promote millets globally, mirroring India's approach to promoting yoga.

Millet consumption in India has been traced all the way back to the Indus Valley Civilisation. But while millets are still among India's major crops, consumption of millets is declining. "The millets had gradually been edged out of our kitchens and our tables because other food grains came in which were easier to prepare and which did not require much labour," said Dr. Maninder Kaur Dwivedi.

Smt. Shubha Thakur stressed the need to reintroduce millets to Indian diets. "To bring millets back to the plate, to bring them to the forefront of our diets, we need to brand them as easy to cook and good to eat. We want to capture the imagination of the younger generations, that you can eat pasta from millets, you can eat noodles from millets, you can eat cakes from millets," she said.

Ambassador Jayant Khobragade is hopeful about the increasing number of startups focused on making products from millets, such as millet-based noodles and millet-based biscuits. He invited all participants to visit the 24 exhibition stalls and cooking demonstration to learn more about millet varieties and their culinary possibilities.

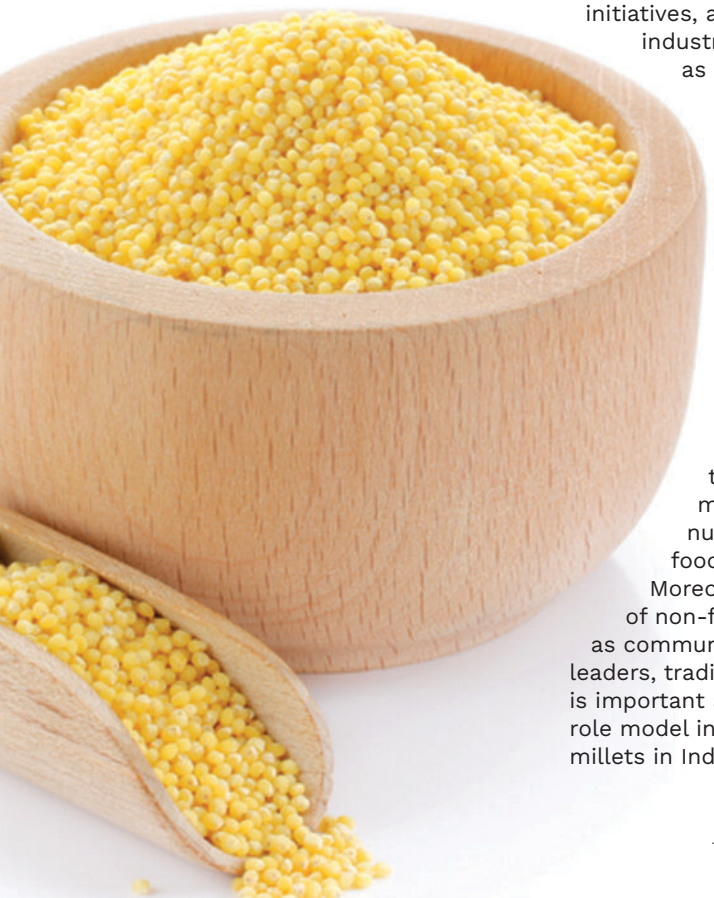


Photo Credit: © *Anastasia_Panait / Shutterstock*

Millets in ASEAN: Indonesia, the Lao PDR, and Thailand

Dr. Andriko Noto Susanto, representing the head of Indonesia's National Food Agency, said that ensuring national food security through dietary diversification, including consumption of millets, is among the country's priorities.

Rinna Syawal, Director of Food Consumption Diversification at the Indonesia National Food Agency, mentioned that Indonesia grows different types of millets, including fox-tailed millet or hotong in Java, Sulawesi, and Maluku; barnyard millet in Sumbawa and Sulawesi, finger millet in Sumatra and Java, and proso millet in Flores.

Director Syawal said that the Indonesian government is employing three key strategies to introduce millets as an alternative carbohydrate source: formulate regulations for local food diversification, conduct promotional campaigns and educational initiatives, and encourage the food industry to incorporate millets as raw materials.

In addition, she said, "Academics can contribute in developing technology and innovation associated with millets. The culinary and tourism sectors also play an important role by offering millet-based menus to visitors. Media can encourage the promotion of millets as healthy and nutritious alternative food to communities. Moreover, the involvement of non-formal leadership, such as community leaders, religious leaders, traditional cultural leaders, is important and they can act as a role model in supporting the use of millets in Indonesia."

In the Lao PDR, although rice remains the primary staple crop, millets are essential in upland areas when rice yields are low during the dry season, according to Vilayphone Sourideth of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR.

Ms. Sourideth said that the Lao PDR government recognises the importance of millets and thus embarked on a survey on the biodiversity of millets in cooperation with the National Institute of Agrobiological Sciences of Japan. She added that the festival allows countries like the Lao PDR an opportunity to learn from India on the versatility of millets as a food source.

In Thailand, Raweewan Chuekittisak of the Department of Agriculture, Thailand, reported that millet cultivation covers 4,000 hectares of land, yielding 8,208 tons. The main produce is grain sorghum, which is used for mushroom production, feed meal, and desserts. Thai farmers grow sorghum as a secondary source of income.

Ms. Chuekittisak said the Thai Department of Agriculture plans to introduce a new variety, sweet sorghum, in the coming years to augment sugarcane production and offer a viable alternative in the face of climate change.

Opportunities for cooperation

Assistant Director Pham Quang Minh of the ASEAN Economic Community Department, ASEAN Secretariat said millets present a range of benefits to ASEAN Member States, particularly in the context of decarbonisation and reduction of the use of harmful chemicals in the agriculture sector. Both of these are priorities of ASEAN, he noted.

Assistant Director Pham said that recent discussions between ASEAN and India have centred around agricultural cooperation and food security, particularly in promoting millets. "ASEAN and India can think about how we also can work together, in post-2025, to promote the production and consumption of millets in ASEAN," he concluded.

ASEAN-India Bazaar

CONNECTING CULTURES THROUGH COMMERCE

Joanne B. Agbisit
Associate Editor, The ASEAN
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

The Mission of India to ASEAN partnered with the Indo-Indian community to organise another ASEAN-India Bazaar. The event was a lead-up to the anniversary of the ASEAN-India dialogue relations on 12 November.

The one-day bazaar, held on 22 October 2023 in Jakarta, gathered dozens of vendors selling a wide range of products, including garments, jewellery, fashion accessories, home décor, and food and beverage. ASEAN Member States also set up their stalls, displaying local wares such as textiles, handicrafts, and food items. Indian cultural performances and a fashion show were some of the day's highlights.

India's Permanent Representative to ASEAN, Ambassador Jayant Khobragade, and Deputy Secretary General (DSG) of ASEAN for the ASEAN Economic Community Satvinder Singh officially opened the bazaar.

Ambassador Khobragade emphasised the special relationship between ASEAN and India in his opening remarks. He noted, "We had achieved a comprehensive strategic partnership, which means the highest level of relationship with ASEAN. As of last calendar year, ASEAN was our biggest trading partner."

Ambassador Khobragade also stressed there is much to celebrate this year as ASEAN and India mark their 31st year of ties. He cited one of India's most recent feats—the successful landing of its spacecraft, Chandrayaan-3, near the southern pole of the Moon. "It was successfully done. And you know, that is the beauty of Indian innovators, that it was done with a modest budget, which is much less than the budget for movies."

Meanwhile, DSG Satvinder Singh praised the initiative, stating that the event is "a testimony of India's continued commitment to deepening cultural linkages with ASEAN, and on the economic side, supporting the connectivity of our micro, small, medium enterprises."

He said, "All business owners who are participating will help generate jobs for a diverse range of informal enterprises. All of this contributes to supporting our economy and the well-being of our people. The bazaar is truly a very relevant initiative that aims to promote the development of our people on both sides, enhance our cultural exchanges, and promote greater amounts of cultural and traditional sharing from both sides."

The bazaar attracted a large multicultural crowd, marking the successful celebration of the ASEAN-India partnership.

India's Permanent Representative to ASEAN, Ambassador Jayant Khobragade (second from left), and Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the ASEAN Economic Community, Satvinder Singh (centre), officially opened the ASEAN-India Bazaar (22/10/2023)

Photo Credit: *©Indian Mission to ASEAN*

ENDING MISINFORMATION THROUGH DIGITAL LITERACY

Joanne B. Agbisit
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Gathering over 70 participants from across ASEAN, the ASEAN Foundation hosted the ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme Impact Forum in Bali, Indonesia, on 14-16 November 2023. The participants consisted of partner organisations, master trainers, mentors, youth advisors from all 10 Member States. Resource persons from the private sector, ASEAN's Committee of Permanent Representatives, and the ASEAN Secretariat also joined the forum.

The forum showcased the achievements of the ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme, a vital initiative designed to help people in ASEAN evaluate information more critically and counter disinformation and misinformation.

Launched in 2021, with support from Google.org, Google's philanthropic arm, the programme is tailored to different underserved communities—parents, teachers, youth, older adults, and local communities—to make everyone feel confident and secure online. Its components include the development of a digital literacy training module, capacity building on digital literacy, an awareness-raising campaign, e-learning platform development, and an in-depth study on digital literacy.

"We started doing the training-of-trainer workshops in the middle of 2022 after COVID-19; then, these master trainers went to the communities to talk, teach, and empower," reported ASEAN Foundation Executive Director Dr. Piti Srisangnam at the forum.

Dr. Piti said the programme has provided training to almost 200,000 individuals in the region, doubling the initial target. The beneficiaries included people with disabilities, non-binary individuals, and other vulnerable sectors—a testament to the ASEAN Foundation's commitment to inclusivity, according to Dr. Piti.

Recognising the importance of youth engagement, an advisory board composed of youth representatives from all Member States was formed to lead the information campaign on digital literacy. "The ASEAN youth advisory group has conducted 12 impactful online and onsite digital literacy campaigns across 10 ASEAN countries," Dr. Piti said.

A pivotal moment in the forum was the launch of the e-learning platform Digital Class ASEAN (digitalclassASEAN.org), "a one-stop hub for ASEAN people to participate in immersive digital literacy courses." The courses encompass responsible digital citizenship, media literacy, disinformation/misinformation, and positive information—all available in 10 ASEAN languages.

In addition, the forum previewed the initial results of the ongoing region-wide study on dis/misinformation led by Dr. Endah Triastuti of the Department of Communication, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Universitas Indonesia. The study will conclude in the first quarter of 2024.

The interactive panel and breakout sessions added depth to the discussion, providing participants with a platform to exchange insights on their experiences in implementing the programme. This included candid discussions on the challenges encountered and valuable recommendations for potential programme extension.

Ensuring that ASEAN citizens are digitally literate and empowered is part of ASEAN's digital transformation strategies. This was emphasised by Director Le Quang Lan of the ASEAN Secretariat, who delivered an opening message on behalf of ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Kao Kim Hourn.

"The region is now the third largest digital economy in the world. We now have more than 460 million active internet users, 80 per cent of them digital consumers," he noted. "That is why an initiative like the ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme is crucial in promoting greater literacy in the region and increasing awareness of online safety."

Marija Ralic, lead for Google.org Asia Pacific, expressed her pride in supporting ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme: "We are proud to support the ASEAN Foundation in empowering people across the region with crucial media literacy and online safety skills. Google.org's dedication to fostering digital safety aligns perfectly with the ASEAN Foundation's mission to empower ASEAN communities through digital literacy which will contribute to digitally resilient ASEAN." Google.org supported the ASEAN Foundation with a grant of 1.5 million US dollars to implement the programme from 2022 to 2024.

Photo Credit: *©ASEAN Foundation*

Golden Anniversary of ASEAN-Japan Relations

Photo Credit: ©ASEAN Summit Media Center / Zabur Karuru

Kiya Masahiko
Ambassador of the Mission of Japan to ASEAN

During the 26th ASEAN-Japan Summit in Jakarta, Joko Widodo, President of Indonesia, chaired the meeting with attendees including Prime Minister Kishida Fumio of Japan and Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, alongside ASEAN Member States and the Prime Minister of Timor-Leste as an Observer (6/9/2023)

This year marks the 50th Year of ASEAN–Japan Friendship and Cooperation. The relationship between ASEAN and Japan started with the Forum on Synthetic Rubber in 1973, six years after ASEAN was established in 1967. For the past 50 years, Japan has been closely working with ASEAN to promote peace, stability, and prosperity through ever-expanding concrete projects for the benefit of the people. Four primary reasons for this important relationship are pointed out below.

Importance of ASEAN for Japan

First, ASEAN is located in a strategically important position in the Indo-Pacific region. ASEAN and Japan enjoy geographical proximity and many commonalities as a maritime nation, while facing common challenges in the region, such as ensuring the freedom of navigation on important sea lanes. ASEAN and Japan have been closely working together to tackle those challenges.

Second, ASEAN is a growth centre of the world. It is a prime manufacturing centre for Japanese companies and holds a potential consumer market with a population of about 670 million. Furthermore, the region boasts numerous fast-growing startups tackling global issues such as energy transition, decarbonisation, and digitalisation.

Third, ASEAN has become a hub of multilayered regional cooperation. Japan has been participating in ASEAN-led regional cooperation frameworks that have developed over time. These include the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF, 1994), ASEAN+3 (APT: Japan, China, and the Republic of Korea, 1997), the East Asia Summit (EAS, 2005), and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus, 2010), and so forth. For each framework, summits and ministerial meetings became institutionalised and regularised, paving the way for multilayered bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.

Fourth, it enables Japan to strengthen its relationship with the so-called Global South. Prime Minister Kishida highlighted relations with Global South countries as a key player for Japan's future and mentioned, "Southeast Asian countries are the closest and most crucial partners for Japan," in a lecture at Johns Hopkins University in the United States in January of this year. We believe that strengthening relations with the close and diverse ASEAN will be the gateway to Japan's diplomacy with the Global South.

Photo Credit: *©ASEAN Secretariat*

Golden Friendship Walk and Run 2023 event in Jakarta (5/11/2023)

What we have achieved—Common areas of interest and cooperation

Looking back on the 50 years of ASEAN-Japan cooperation, Japan has worked with ASEAN in various fields. One way to lay out our cooperation is by focusing on ASEAN-Japan ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) Cooperation projects. The AOIP, established by ASEAN in 2019, set objectives based on the principles of ASEAN unity and centrality, inclusiveness, transparency, and respect for international law, among others. AOIP guides cooperation in promoting an environment for peace, stability and prosperity in the region, highlighting four priority areas of cooperation: maritime cooperation, connectivity, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and economic and other possible areas of cooperation.

Japan expressed its full support for the AOIP in 2019 and was the first among ASEAN's partners to do so. In 2020, ASEAN and Japan issued the Joint Statement on Cooperation on AOIP at the Summit meeting. In February this year, former Foreign Minister Hayashi announced Japan's support for mainstreaming AOIP. In March, Prime Minister Kishida announced a new contribution of 100 million US dollars to the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF). In September, he attended the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF) and announced the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Connectivity Initiative, providing maximum support for mainstreaming and implementation of the AOIP.

Concrete projects under AOIP

Concrete actions include the following initiatives as progress reports on Japan's Cooperation for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

Maritime cooperation. Japan as an archipelagic nation fully understands the importance of maritime cooperation. With strong commitment to addressing maritime safety and security challenges in the region, Japan has contributed to the efforts in maritime cooperation with a funding of 1 billion Japanese yen or almost 7 million US dollars through JAIF. These include initiatives against piracy and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, strengthening capacity building for marine debris reduction, joint hydrographic survey of the straits of Malacca and Singapore, and more expanding projects.

Connectivity. Collaboration in connectivity is critically important

Prime Minister Kishida Fumio received a courtesy call from Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary General of ASEAN, during his visit to Japan (24/10/2023)

Photo Credit: ©ASEAN Secretariat

for narrowing the development gaps and supporting deeper integration of the ASEAN Community. Japan has continuously facilitated a variety of cooperation, ranging from people-to-people connectivity including the Japan East-Asia Exchange for Students and Youths or JENESYS; Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Attachment Program to quality infrastructure such as ASEAN-Japan Transport Partnership including Luang Prabang Action Plan, which was adopted this November as a new action plan of the transport sector for the next decade.

UN Sustainable Development Goals. Japan's vision towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals is paramount and pledges to "Leave no one behind," in the implementation process. Japan's efforts are based on the concept of human security and extends across ASEAN in many fields: for health sector through ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED); for disaster management in cooperation with AHA Centre; and for the environment and climate through Strategic Program for Japan Climate and Environment (SPACE).

Economic and other possible areas of cooperation. Cooperation in the economic sector and other areas of cooperation are imperative for Japan to further strengthen economic ties with ASEAN and further across the Indo-Pacific. Japan will extend support to the region in the field of cyber security through ASEAN-Japan Cybersecurity Capacity Building Centre programme, agriculture with the ASEAN-Japan Midori Cooperation Plan and ASEAN-JICA Food Value Chain Development project; and other economic cooperation, for example, through the ASEAN-Japan Economic Co-Creation Vision and Future Design and Action Plan.

One notable area of cooperation is in the field of law and justice. The ASEAN-Japan Special Meeting of Justice Ministers and related Meetings, the ASEAN-G7 Justice Ministers' Interface and ASEAN-Japan Special Youth Forum took place for the first time this year. ASEAN and Japan confirmed their commitment to promoting fundamental values such as the rule of law, and held discussions on the initiatives to promote strategic cooperation between ASEAN and Japan in the field of law and justice.

This year, we had 5 special ASEAN-Japan Ministerial Meetings on the occasion of 50th anniversary: Ministerial Meetings on Finance and Central Bank Governors (the Republic of Korea, May), Justice (Japan, July), Agriculture and Forestry (Malaysia, October), Disaster Management (Viet Nam, October), Tourism Ministers' Special Dialogue (Japan, October). In addition, ASEAN-Japan Business Week took place in Japan in June.

In Jakarta, the Mission of Japan to ASEAN also had a couple of Commemorative Events to enhance awareness of ASEAN-Japan relationship by inviting ASEAN Member States and other partners, such as ASEAN-Japan Fair (September) and Golden Friendship Walk and Run 2023 (November).

"Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunities"

The highlight of the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation is the ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit in December with the main keywords of "trust" and "co-creation." Since the Fukuda Doctrine in 1977, Japan has emphasised "heart to heart" relations and has built up cooperation and exchanges with ASEAN over the years based on this value. The "trust" gained over the years of efforts is the greatest asset of the ASEAN-Japan relationship.

Japan and ASEAN have immense capacity to contribute to the region and the world by working together to "co-create" solutions to global and social challenges, such as energy transition, climate change, environment, digitalisation, health, and disaster prevention, for the future, based on the "trust" that has been earned through 50 years of heart-to-heart exchanges and cooperation. This year's catchphrase, "Golden Friendship, Golden Opportunities," embodies the spirit and depth of this relationship.

ASEAN and Japan can unleash their potential and enhance their impact by operationalising the AOIP vision and scaling up the outcomes, from the Indo-Pacific region to the world. By promoting mutual trust and co-creating solutions, ASEAN and Japan will together contribute to peace, stability, and prosperity in the region and the world.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

GOLDEN BRIDGE SHORT VIDEO CAMPAIGN

ASEAN-Japan Centre

From March to June 2023, the ASEAN-Japan Centre (AJC) ran the Golden Bridge Short Video Campaign on Instagram. The campaign invited creatives to produce a 15-to-30-second video visualising how ASEAN and Japan have built bridges of understanding and friendship and created heart-to-heart connections over the past 50 years.

Of the 300 entries from the 10 ASEAN Member States and Japan, AJC selected 29 of the best videos. Snippets from these winning entries constituted the commemorative video for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation with the theme "Open the Golden Future." The commemorative video was launched on 6 October and is available on AJC's social media accounts.

One of the entries stood above the rest and was awarded the grand prize. The video titled "ASEAN-Japan: Answer to my Senbazuru" by Mayumi Francine Besorio (@mayumibesorio) was selected for her touching narrative on coping with childhood illness with Japanese animes and origami.

She said, "...because of Japan, especially the animes on TV shows, magically, my heart became so much happier and better. As a child, I started creating paper cranes because they said if you create 1,000 paper cranes, it will grant you a wish. A wish for my health and a wish that I could visit The Land of the Rising Sun...Japan, you are the healer and the answer to my heart's senbazuru."

The 28 other winners were as follows:
@_liliology
@14mshbzierre
@5am_film
@affinakhanthesecond
@bloom.the.earth
@estherohnmaung
@experimental_angle
@franky_asshodiq
@hamster_low
@hzqaqwa
@iwapt
@jai__ro
@japans2ries
@jpcine_
@khanhchii_i
@khun.love.you
@md_qai
@nina.instructor
@nur_izdiharr
@project.mikeithappen
@sandart_hokkaido
@seriphap23
@souphabandith_
@sseirraaaaa
@tepp_eee
@thilosophy_
@ttum_potter
@zona.mp4

The online awards ceremony was held on 5 October. Ambassador of Japan to ASEAN Kiya Masahiko, celebrated the campaign's successful completion, saying that it was "a collaborative exchange among ASEAN countries" and that he looks forward to working with the participants for the next 50 years and beyond.

Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam to Japan Haji Shahbudin Haji Musa (Chairman of the ASEAN Tokyo Committee, Jan-Jun 2023), congratulated the winners and said, "When we look back 20 years down the road, I think you all can be proud that you were part of the celebrations this year."

THE ASEAN PAVILION: DESIGN FOR CHANGE

GOOD DESIGN EXHIBITION 2023

TOKYO, JAPAN
25-29 OCTOBER 2023

ASEAN-Japan Centre

The winners' videos from the Golden Bridge Short Video Campaign were played at Good Design Exhibition 2023's venue

Forty design products from 10 ASEAN Member States were exhibited at the Good Design Exhibition 2023. The exhibition was organised as a side event of the World Design Assembly in Tokyo, Japan, from 25-29 October 2023.

The products on display highlighted items that blended the traditional and the modern, as well as products that contributed to society, ranging from bags made by ethnic groups, sustainable footwear, traditional clothing, and lifestyle goods with a modern twist to upcycled furniture. Designers were also present at the pavilion to interact with the public, who were keen to learn more about the design industry in ASEAN.

The ASEAN Pavilion: Design for Change was initiated by the ASEAN-Japan Centre with the Japan Institute of Design Promotion to celebrate the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation, along with promoting the region's award-winning products to the Japanese public.

The first handbag brand in the Lao PDR, NAREE, exhibited its collection made from banana fibre and stem

Bambike is a Filipino socio-ecological enterprise crafting bamboo bicycles with fair-trade labor and sustainable practices

Photo Credit: ©ASEAN-Japan Centre

ASEAN-Japan Fair 2023

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION

Ixora Tri Devi
Staff Writer, The ASEAN
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Taiko drummers captivate the audience at the ASEAN-Japan Fair opening ceremony (29/9/2023)

The ASEAN-Japan Fair 2023 took centre stage at the Main Atrium of Plaza Senayan in Jakarta from 29 September to 1 October 2023. Organised by the Mission of Japan to ASEAN and the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund (JAIF) Management Team, this event marked five decades of robust collaboration, a significant milestone in the enduring friendship between ASEAN and Japan.

Ambassador Kiya Masahiko, representing the Mission of Japan to ASEAN, expressed profound gratitude for the collaborative spirit that powered the event. He highlighted that public-private sector partnership is a unique aspect of the ASEAN-Japan Fair.

"The important thing about this ASEAN-Japan Fair is that it is a joint work of public-private partners. Thanks to all the support from ASEAN and Japan. So many companies in Japan and ASEAN are working together for the benefit of the region and the world," Ambassador Kiya stated in his remarks.

In his address, Deputy-Secretary General of ASEAN for Political-Security Community, Michael Tene, acknowledged the historical roots of the ASEAN-Japan friendship. He emphasised the depth and breadth of their cooperation, spanning political, security, economic, and sociocultural spheres, making it truly comprehensive in nature.

DSG Tene lauded Japan's pivotal role in areas such as trade, investment, climate change, disaster management, education, and healthcare, reaffirming Japan's status as a leading partner for ASEAN.

"In the past 50 years, ASEAN-Japan relationship has recorded many important achievements. Our relationship is based on shared values and interest and characterised by mutual trust and respect."

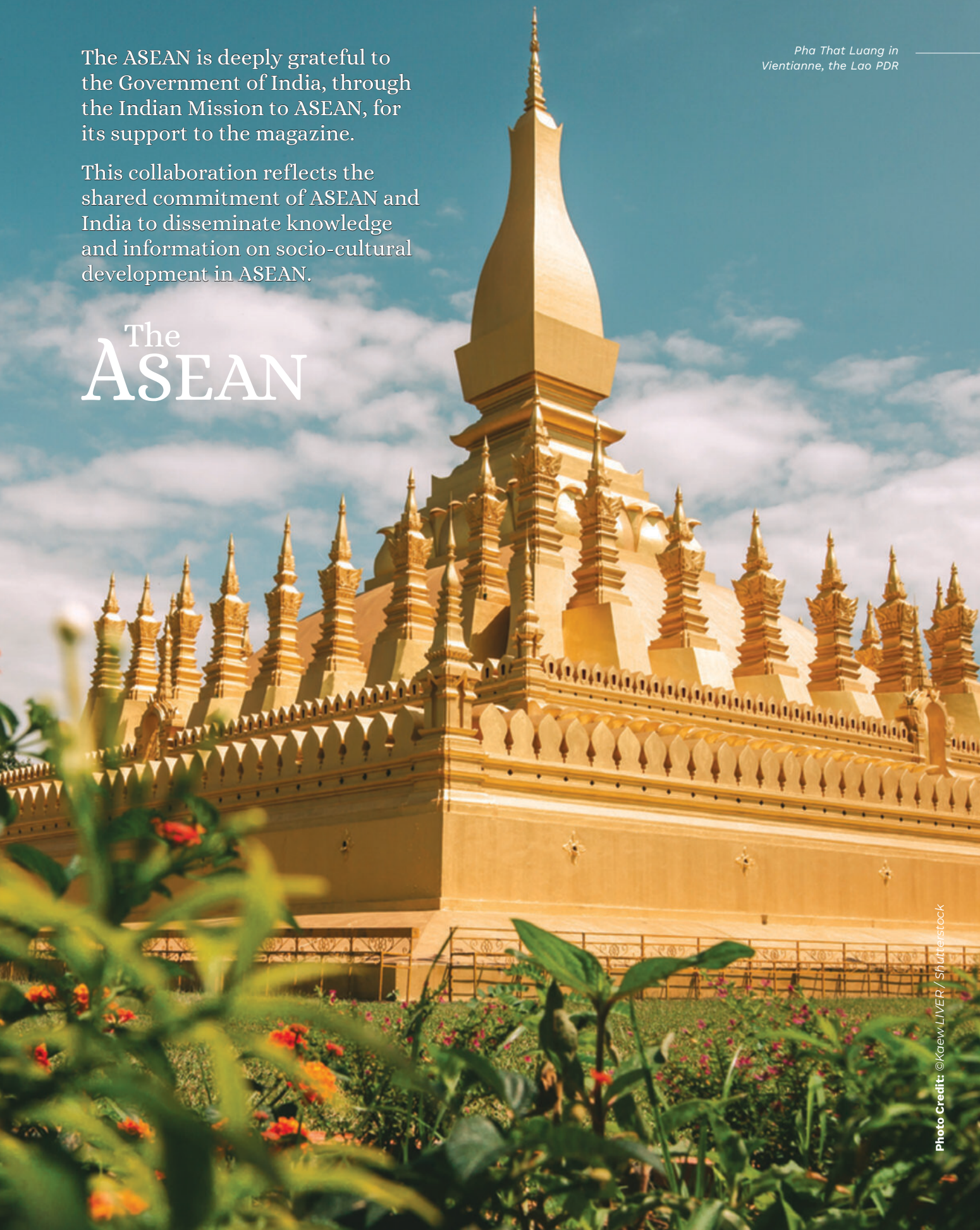
The fair featured exhibitions by the Japan International Cooperation Agency or JICA and prominent Japanese companies operating in Southeast Asia, such as, J-Trust Bank, Marubeni, and Uniqlo. There were also performances and other activities during the fair. A mascot, JABOT, was chosen to symbolise the innovative spirit and creativity fostered through ASEAN-Japan cooperation.

Photo Credit: *©ASEAN Secretariat*

The ASEAN is deeply grateful to the Government of India, through the Indian Mission to ASEAN, for its support to the magazine.

This collaboration reflects the shared commitment of ASEAN and India to disseminate knowledge and information on socio-cultural development in ASEAN.

The ASEAN



Pha That Luang in Vientianne, the Lao PDR

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This publication was made possible with the support of:

The Government of India